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*Writing and Society
in Ancient Cyprus*

PHILIPPA M. STEELE

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Writing and Society in Ancient Cyprus

From its first adoption of writing at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age, ancient Cyprus was home to distinctive scripts and writing habits, often setting it apart from other areas of the Mediterranean and Near East. This well-illustrated volume is the first to explore the development and importance of Cypriot writing over a period of more than 1,500 years in the 2nd and 1st millennia BC. Five themed chapters deal with issues ranging from the acquisition of literacy and the adaptation of new writing systems to the visibility of writing and its role in the marking of identities. The agency of Cypriots in shaping the island's literate landscape is given prominence, and an extended consideration of the social context of writing leads to new insights on Cypriot scripts and their users. Cyprus provides a stimulating case to demonstrate the importance of contextualised approaches to the development of writing systems.

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Frontispiece The grounds of All Souls College, Oxford. Photograph by P.M. Steele.

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Abbreviations

<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Studies</i>
<i>BCH</i>	<i>Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique</i>
<i>CCEC</i>	<i>Cahiers du Centre d'Études Chypriotes</i>
<i>CHIC</i>	Olivier, J.-P. and Godart, L. (1996) <i>Corpus Hieroglyphicarum Inscriptionum Cretae</i> , <i>Études Crétoises</i> 31, Paris
<i>CIS</i>	de Vogüé, M., <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum</i> , multiple volumes, Paris (1889–)
<i>GORILA</i>	Godart, L. and Olivier, J.-P. <i>Recueil des Inscriptions en Linéaire A</i> , vols. 1–5, <i>Études Crétoises</i> 21.1–5, Paris (1976–85).
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
<i>JMA</i>	<i>Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology</i>
<i>RDAC</i>	<i>Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus</i>
<i>SEG</i>	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>
<i>SIMA</i>	<i>Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology</i>

Introduction

This book is the publication of the 2014 Evans-Pritchard Lectures at All Souls College, Oxford, delivered in May that year with the title *Society and Writing in Ancient Cyprus*. This annual lecture series is dedicated to the memory of Sir Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard, who was Professor of Social Anthropology and Fellow of All Souls from 1946 to 1970. The remit of the lectures is that they should fall within one of the disciplines (social anthropology, classical studies, archaeology, modern history, oriental studies) and the geographical areas (Africa, the Middle East, the Mediterranean) that most occupied him. Having trained as a classicist at Cambridge, and specialised during my doctorate and subsequently on epigraphic and linguistic research on the eastern Mediterranean and particularly the island of Cyprus, I chose to focus the lecture series on the place of writing in ancient Cypriot society over a broad period from the beginning of the Late Bronze Age through to the Hellenistic period. Working on the languages of ancient Cyprus,¹ what has often struck me is that there is quite a lot that could be said – but that can often be either implicitly assumed or simply overlooked in scholarship – about the social and political backdrop to the inscriptions, which in turn is relevant to our impression of how ancient Cypriots used writing.

As I prepared for the lectures, I found myself reading a number of Evans-Pritchard's works, many for the first time. I am not an anthropologist and had no intention of introducing an anthropological slant to my analysis of Cypriot writing; my approach was largely grounded in primary analysis of epigraphic material, studied alongside the broader archaeological and historical context of the inscribed objects. However, in reading Evans-Pritchard's work, I was struck by his careful accounts of the societies he studied and in particular his passionate descriptions of methodological approaches towards anthropological research. An awareness of the ways in which social context is relevant to understanding practices and customs seemed wholly appropriate to my subject matter, namely the position of

¹ Especially Steele (2013), which focuses on linguistic analysis of many of the inscriptions that reappear in the present work.

writing in ancient Cypriot society. As a token to Evans-Pritchard’s influence and outstanding body of work, I have prefaced each of the ensuing chapters with a short quotation from one of his publications, in each case chosen because of some topical or methodological link with the material discussed. I hope the reader will indulge this small gesture in honour of the man who made the lecture series, and thereby this book, possible.

The outline of the original lectures is preserved throughout the book, although inevitably material has been added or changed to some extent since the original presentation. The reader will therefore find not a strictly chronological progression but a thematic one, from chapter to chapter, although with a tendency to treat the earliest material first where possible within the framework. The thematic focus was chosen because it allows, I hope, greater analytical potential. However, to aid the reader’s path through Cypriot writing over time, cross-references to different chapters and sections have been added where possible, signalling discussion of related or similar material. It may also be helpful to have in mind the [chronological table](#) and [Map 1.1](#), to make sense of references to different periods and sites. I hope that the overlapping central themes of the book, from developments in writing and literacy to the connections between writing and identity, will emerge as the reader progresses.

Chronological table: the Late Bronze Age to the Hellenistic period (absolute dates according to Dikaios (1969–71)).

Late Cypriot IA	1575–1525 BC
Late Cypriot IB	1525–1425 BC
Late Cypriot IIA	1425/1400–1375 BC
Late Cypriot IIB	1375–1300 BC
Late Cypriot IIC	300–1230 BC
Late Cypriot IIIA	1220/1210–1150 BC
Late Cypriot IIIB	1150–1050 BC
Cypro-Geometric I	1050–950 BC
Cypro-Geometric II	950–850 BC
Cypro-Geometric III	850–750 BC
Cypro-Archaic	750–480 BC
Cypro-Classical	480–310 BC
Ptolemaic/Hellenistic	310–30 BC



Map I.1 A selection of major Cypriot sites.

So, whereas some custom of a people, when plotted on a distribution map, is of interest for the ethnologist as evidence of ethnic movement, of a cultural drift, or of past contact between peoples, it is of interest to the social anthropologist as part of the whole social life of the people at the present time. The mere probability that they may have borrowed it from some other people is not very significant for him since he cannot know for certain that they did borrow it and, even if they did, he does not know when, how, and why they borrowed it.¹

1.1 An Internal Approach

This chapter aims to consider the context in which ancient Cypriots developed the technology of writing. It should be emphasised, however, that when attempting to study the initial arrival of writing on Cyprus in the Late Bronze Age, we face some immediate problems because of significant unknown factors. Although the writing system that appears at this time, commonly labelled ‘Cypro-Minoan’, has evident affinities with the linear writing systems of the Late Bronze Age Aegean (in particular Linear A), a direct derivation from Linear A itself has been questioned. The numbers of surviving inscriptions are quite small, especially for the earliest period of writing on Cyprus, meaning that we have a limited pool of evidence for assessing script developments. It is also the case that Cypro-Minoan remains undeciphered, with only a small number of sign values identified with confidence and the linguistic content of its inscriptions unknown.

These problems make it very difficult to tell from whom ancient Cypriots borrowed the technology of writing, and indeed when and how – although broadly speaking this has not prevented epigraphists and archaeologists from making assumptions about how and why, and indeed when and where, the transmission might have taken place. This question was approached from the time of the very earliest scholarship from a predominantly comparative perspective, looking for the links with Linear A

and Crete to explain when and how Cyprus acquired writing: when the famous archaeologist Arthur Evans first named the Cypriot Late Bronze Age script 'Cypro-Minoan',² there was an explicit assumption of some relation to Linear A, the primary script of his Minoan period on Crete.

The quotation from Evans-Pritchard at the beginning of this chapter shows him commenting on a similarly comparative approach taken by ethnographers (or ethnologists as he referred to them), which for social anthropologists was not only unhelpful but to some extent misleading. While an ethnologist would principally be interested in how the custom was acquired, for the social anthropologist it is the place of the custom within the society that would be of interest. Evans-Pritchard was of course principally interested in societies in which the initial adoption of a particular custom was likely to be shrouded in the mists of time, precisely because of the late advent of literacy and literary traditions, and so the lack of evidence for early developments, in the societies he spent his life studying. Scholars of the ancient Mediterranean have better resources at their disposal when considering such questions, and so the outlook for studying the origins of Cypro-Minoan is not quite so gloomy. Nevertheless it is worth reconsidering the questions we usually ask about the transmission of writing to Cyprus. It is common to consider script developments in the ancient Mediterranean as results of, and therefore also as evidence of, contact between different peoples and cultures, and usually of people speaking different languages. The study of early Cypro-Minoan has been dominated by such a comparative approach, with the emphasis on contact leading to assumptions about when and how literacy was acquired. However, what if we were to shift the focus from the external to the internal? What if we were to begin by considering not the relations between ancient Cyprus and contemporary Mediterranean powers, but rather the internal factors that gave rise to the advent of literacy on the island?

This does not mean that we will abandon the comparative approach entirely. In fact, as we will see, considering from what source script Cypro-Minoan was developed (directly from Linear A, or not?) remains important if we wish to study the early stages of Cypriot writing. For example, if we can identify the source script, then we can also ask which of its features were preserved and which abandoned, and what were the practical reasons behind these choices. First, however, it is useful to consider what we know about ancient Cyprus and its inhabitants in the period when inscriptions begin to appear, which has the potential to tell us a lot more about the

² Evans (1909) 68–77.

reasons why Cyprus was ready to adopt literacy at this time. Privileging the internal approach in this way shifts the focus to the immediate context of writing and provides a new perspective that has not previously been studied systematically.

1.2 Ancient Cyprus in the Early Late Bronze Age: The Archaeological Picture

When and why did writing first appear on Cyprus? The inscription that has often been picked out as representing the earliest phase of Cypriot writing is a fragmentary clay tablet discovered at Enkomi (##001) and dated probably to the period Late Cypriot IB (LCIB, a ceramic phase). The correlation of ceramic phases to absolute dates is a difficult process and is still being reassessed by archaeologists today,³ but the LCIB phase is thought to correspond to the late 16th or the 15th century BC: see [Table 1.1](#). However, there is some difficulty with dating the tablet precisely. It is possible that two other inscribed objects from Cyprus, both also found at Enkomi, may in fact be earlier than the tablet. One is a clay label, sometimes referred to as a ‘weight’, that is dated by context to LCIA-B (##095), and the other a cylinder seal dated stylistically to LCIA (##225). The latter would usually be assumed to belong to the 16th century BC, and the former may belong to the 16th or first part of the 15th. If we were to accept the revised radiocarbon dating scheme proposed by Manning,⁴ these objects could even date as early as the 17th century BC. The inscriptions themselves will be revisited later in much more detail ([section 1.3](#)).

Since the only direct evidence comes from the inscriptions themselves, our view of the chronology of early writing on Cyprus is constrained by chance survival: the surviving evidence points towards the technology having been developed in LCIA, but we have no way of knowing how many texts have been lost to us and whether some of them might have pre-dated this period. The problem is further exacerbated by the fact that only inscriptions on durable materials (e.g. stone, baked clay, some metals) have any chance of surviving given that Cyprus is lacking in suitable environments

³ The scheme proposed by Schaeffer (1948) 403 was revised by Dikaios (1969–71), whose dating is still often followed today. Knapp (1994), (1997), (2008), (2013) has suggested a different categorisation of periods of the Bronze Age on Cyprus, and in his 2013 work includes an appendix by Manning (2013) giving a revised scheme of absolute dates based on radiocarbon analysis. See also Åström (1972) and Wiener (2003) for other discussions of the dating of Cypriot phases, and Vandenabeele (2007) and Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 2 on the dating of Cypro-Minoan inscriptions.

⁴ Manning (2013).

Table 1.1 Absolute dates assigned to the Middle-Late Bronze Age transition on Cyprus.

Period categorisation according to Knapp 1994, 1997, 2008, 2013		Absolute dates according to Dikaïos 1969–71 (ceramic phases)	Absolute dates according to Manning 2013 (radiocarbon dates)
Traditional periods			
Protohistoric Bronze Age (ProBA)	Middle Cypriot III (MCIII)	1700–1575	1750/1700–1680/1650
	Late Cypriot IA (LCIA)	1575–1525	1680/1650–1450
	Late Cypriot IB (LCIB)	1525–1425	

for the preservation of more fragile materials (e.g. wood, papyrus, parchment). It cannot be ruled out that future discoveries could push the use of writing further back, even into the Middle Cypriot III period (MCIII), but since the surviving evidence suggests that the technology was developed in LCI, we will take that as our starting point for discussion. What factors might have led to Cyprus being ready to acquire the technology of writing at this time?

Significant changes that had begun in MCIII formed the foundation for a completely new social situation in Cyprus by the LCI period. This transitional period has sometimes been referred to as the start of the ‘Protohistoric Bronze Age’ (ProBA), as distinct from the preceding ‘Prehistoric Bronze Age’ (PreBA).⁵ Knapp summarises the new outlook as a development from an ‘egalitarian, isolated, cooperative and village-oriented’ society to one that was now ‘socially stratified ... international, competitive and town-centred’.⁶ Another way of looking at these transformations is as developments in the complexity of social structures working alongside changes in the extent and nature of contact with the world outside. The population grew, settlements became larger and were supported by more extensive exploitation of agricultural resources, previously sparsely inhabited areas of the island became home to new towns, the built landscape witnessed drastic changes and there is evidence for new ideologies and practices as well as an unprecedented level of visible signs of social stratification in the material record. Several related factors seem to have played a role in the transformation, some economic and some more strictly social. However, it is difficult to tell whether the economic developments triggered the social ones, or vice versa. Although the transformation, often

⁵ See Knapp (1994), (1997), (2008), (2013).

⁶ Knapp (2013) 348.

understood in terms of ‘urbanisation’ or ‘state formation’, came to Cyprus relatively late compared with other civilisations around the eastern Mediterranean, its impact was drastic and decisive.

At this time, there was a huge increase in the exploitation of the island’s natural copper resources, and with it arose a specialised metalworking industry producing significant quantities of copper that could then be used per se or form the basis (alongside tin) for the production of bronze.⁷ While some of the copper would have been used for local consumption, the metal was also in high demand around the Mediterranean and this gave Cyprus a chance to emerge as the whole region’s dominant provider of a very desirable resource. This began a trend that was so important to the island’s economy that Cyprus became synonymous with copper, manifest in the metal’s name. Because copper was so widely sought after, Cyprus became connected to wide-ranging Mediterranean trading networks,⁸ giving an opportunity not only to export to other societies around the Mediterranean (in Egypt, the Levant, Anatolia and the Aegean), but also to import goods from far and wide. As well as propelling Cyprus to international renown, this allowed the islanders access to new commodities and luxury goods that would not previously have been easily available.⁹

About the same time, the island witnessed substantial social reconfiguration that is clearly linked to the new economic developments. The growth in numbers and in size of archaeologically visible settlements from before and after the transition is a good starting point for observing the vast differences between the Middle Cypriot and Late Cypriot periods.¹⁰ Although the numbers and sizes of settlements had increased steadily during the Middle Bronze Age, it was in MCIII–LCI that the settlement pattern witnessed a major shift, as some parts of the island became much more densely populated and new sites appeared, particularly on the coast, and in the south and especially the east of the island. Most famous is one of the sites that emerged on the eastern coastline facing the Levant, namely Enkomi (*Ayios Iakovos*), which will feature heavily in our discussion of early literacy on Cyprus. Other important sites that arose at this time include Morphou (*Toumba tou Skourou*) in the north-west, Hala Sultan Tekke (*Vyzakia*) in the south-east, Episkopi/Kourion (*Bamboula*) in the south and Kouklia (*Palaepaphos*) in the south-west.¹¹ These larger

⁷ On the development of the copper industry, see Kassianidou (2008).

⁸ Mediterranean-wide developments at this time, and the place of Cyprus among them, are amply illustrated in Broodbank (2013) ch. 8.

⁹ On the economic developments of this period and their ramifications, see Peltenburg (1996).

¹⁰ See the maps in Steel (2004) 120, 149; also Knapp (2013) 278, 350.

¹¹ See especially Keswani (1996) on the new settlement pattern.

settlements are conspicuously positioned so as to be near to or on the coast but also sufficiently close to sites where copper was being refined that they could exploit internal resources as well as playing a role in the export of Cyprus' mineral wealth and the import of foreign luxury goods.¹²

It is not only the changes in the settlement pattern that indicate social upheaval at this time, but also numerous changes in the material record. The appearance of foreign luxury goods is one of those changes, and strongly indicates social stratification in which elites were consciously seeking to reinforce their status through the use and display of exotic and expensive objects.¹³ Elite behaviour also seems to be in evidence in the built landscape, for example in the series of forts constructed in different areas of the island. Most prominent of these is the 'fortress' at the northern entrance of Enkomi, a large monumental building with a central courtyard and numerous other rooms that is almost universally acknowledged to be administrative in nature and to reflect the presence of some sort of authority.¹⁴ It is easy to imagine that the elites in important Cypriot sites in the LCI period were both fuelling the economic expansion and benefiting from it in terms of personal wealth, social status and local administrative power.

It is difficult to get a sense of the overall distribution of power on the island in LCI, because the only site that has been excavated widely enough to give significant evidence for this period is Enkomi. While some archaeologists argue for the existence of multiple political powers on the island at this time (i.e. widespread, heterarchical power systems that might initially have been carried over from a similar distribution of local control in the Middle Cypriot), others have suggested that Enkomi was the only significant centre of power and had control over other parts of the island and most importantly over the production and movement of copper. The arguments are difficult to assess because it is possible that the archaeological record is skewed in favour of Enkomi (especially due to the relative extent of excavation at the site). Furthermore, the role of the series of forts that appeared across part of the island at this time remains disputed: were they built by locals as local defensive structures,¹⁵ for example, or were they part of Enkomi's 'hinterland strategy' for maintaining control over the island's copper resources?¹⁶ Later on, around the 14th century BC, Cyprus appears

¹² See Portugali and Knapp (1985) 50–61, Knapp (1998).

¹³ See Webb (2005).

¹⁴ See Dikaios (1969–71) 16–21 and 510–11 on the building.

¹⁵ E.g. Merrillees (1971).

¹⁶ Peltenburg (1996) 33.

to have played a role in international diplomacy, as attested in cuneiform documents from sites such as Tell el-Amarna (Akhetaten), Bogazkoy (Hattusha) and Ras Shamra (Ugarit), in which the king of ‘Alashiya’ (a place name widely accepted to correspond to Cyprus) exchanged letters with other eastern Mediterranean powers (see further [section 1.6.2](#) below). These external sources may hint that Cyprus was politically unified in the 14th century but they cannot be relied on as positive evidence for the earlier LCI period, and we may even doubt their value as evidence for the LCII period given that the documents reflect long-range diplomatic relationships and are often formulaic.¹⁷

We cannot easily settle the question as to whether Enkomi held political control over the whole or large parts of Cyprus in LCI,¹⁸ but there can be no doubt that Enkomi was in a fortunate position in this period. Its material and mortuary record show clear evidence of imported luxury and prestige goods originating from the Levant and Egypt.¹⁹ The monumental ‘fortress’ building is almost certainly to be linked with administration as well as status display, and although the evidence for a link between this building and copper working for the LCI period is not as well attested as for later periods, there can be little doubt that Enkomi’s wealth was linked to copper production from the start.²⁰ A further element that suggests administrative development is the high concentration of glyptic production at the site: cylinder seals and other glyptic devices are often assumed to have been used as tools for authenticating transactions and exchanges important to the economy, practices well attested in and perhaps borrowed from the Near East.²¹ Unfortunately, however, very little evidence of sealings (i.e. the impressions made by the seals in the context in which they were used) survives, making it difficult to reconstruct the items’ potential administrative uses.²² Another common assumption is that seals acted as personal indicators of status (with images representing the individual in a similar way to heraldic coats of arms), which could imply a link with the emergence of elites at Enkomi attempting to control economic practices, although this is very difficult to substantiate without more evidence for seal usage. Leaving aside the question mark over the extent of Enkomi’s control outside

¹⁷ See e.g. Moran (1992) 104–13 and 188–90 on the relevant Amarna letters mentioning Alashiya (which date to the early 14th century, i.e. early LCII).

¹⁸ For overviews of the different arguments, see Knapp (2008) 336–7 and (2013) 432–5.

¹⁹ See Keswani (1989), Knapp (1998).

²⁰ See Kassianidou (2012); also Courtois (1982) on the development of the copper industry at Enkomi throughout the LBA.

²¹ See Smith (1994), Webb (2002).

²² See Webb (2005).

of its local area, it is clear that the city became an important centre at an early stage – and, as we will see, it is perhaps unsurprising that the earliest attestations of writing on Cyprus are also associated with this site.²³

It is against the background of a burgeoning economy based on the island's natural resources and the significant external demand for them, alongside the rise of elite individuals or groups operating within a hierarchical system and taking part in status display, that the appearance of writing in LCI Cyprus must be measured. There can be no doubt that the advent of literacy must be related to the vast economic and social changes of this period, but nonetheless its exact context remains poorly understood. In order to understand the significance of literacy to LCI Cypriot society, we will begin by examining the earliest attestations of writing and the type and context of the objects on which the inscriptions appear. This will also lead us to consider related epigraphic problems, such as the apparent difference in epigraphic repertoire employed in some of the earliest inscriptions.

1.3 The Earliest Examples of Cypriot Writing

The three inscriptions mentioned at the beginning of the last [section \(1.2\)](#) can all be dated to the LCI period, and constitute the earliest surviving evidence for writing on Cyprus: a clay tablet ##001, a clay 'weight' or 'label' ##095 and a steatite cylinder seal ##225, all originating from Enkomi.²⁴ We will begin by considering the context and object type of each of the inscriptions before analysing their epigraphic features.

The tablet ##001 is made of clay and is unusually thick by comparison with clay tablets from the Aegean or Near East, with no exact existing parallels known for the object type. It is broken at the bottom and preserves three lines of text on one side, written when the clay was still wet (21 signs), with a further two signs appearing on its right-hand edge, at about the height of the first line of text, written when the clay had begun to dry: see [Figure 1.1](#). The clay used in the tablet looks very similar in type to that of some other Cypro-Minoan documents, and petrographic analysis suggests

²³ On possible links between the introduction of writing and stimulation of glyptic production, see also Smith (2003).

²⁴ The numbers prefixed with ## originate from Olivier (2007) (with further numbers added in Ferrara (2012/13) and Valério (2014) and are used to refer to Cypro-Minoan inscriptions in most recent publications. Ferrara also identified the three objects under discussion here (##001, ##095 and ##225) as the three inscriptions that give evidence for the earliest phase of writing on Cyprus and at Enkomi, though without discussing their epigraphic features in detail (Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 53).

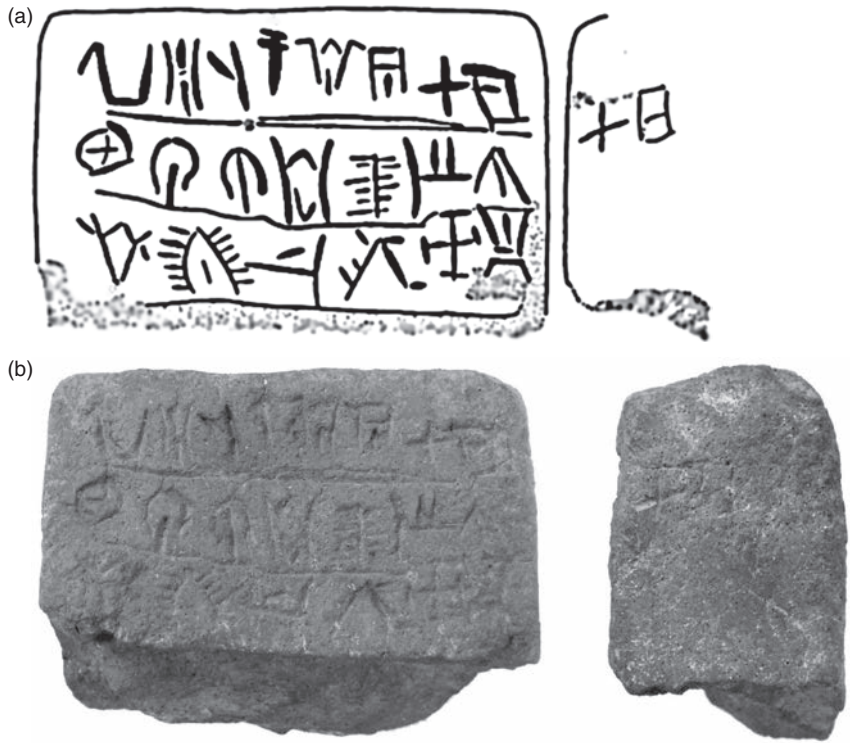


Figure 1.1 Enkomi clay tablet #001.

a possible local clay source in the Pedheios river channel near Enkomi itself.²⁵

The tablet was found in the ‘fortress’ building at Enkomi (in Area III, Quartier 1 W, room 103), and notably very close to evidence for copper smelting. Strictly speaking we can only give the object a date of ‘LCIIB *ante quem*’,²⁶ because it was found in the filling between floors viii and ix and so not in its original context, but it is likely that it was associated with the activities represented by floors viii and ix, dated to LCIB.²⁷ The association with copper smelting is important, as is its discovery in the Enkomi ‘fortress’ building, especially in light of the close link between economic factors and social developments highlighted in the previous section (1.2) that characterise the period in which writing first appears. Although the content of the inscription remains mysterious (see section 1.4), the proximity of industrial activity to its find spot has sometimes been taken to suggest an

²⁵ See Goren et al. (2003) 236–7.

²⁶ See Dikaios (1963).

²⁷ On its context see Dikaios (1963); see also Baurain (1980) and Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 53–5.

administrative context.²⁸ It furthermore seems quite likely that the two signs on its edge (which repeat the first two signs of line 1 of the inscription provided that we read that line from right to left²⁹) are intended as a reference to the content of the tablet, thus raising the possibility that it once belonged to ‘a larger, organized, deposit system’.³⁰ The use of inscriptions on the edge of documents as a colophon or external reference is a practice known in the Near East, but it also seems to appear in a few later Cypro-Minoan documents: one of the clay cylinders from Kalavassos (##102), a ‘CM2’ tablet from Enkomi (##209), one of the tablets from Ugarit (##212) and one of the new tablets discovered at Pyla-Kokkinokremos.³¹

The second object, ##095, comprises a flat, pointed piece of clay, pierced at its narrower end and bearing a single-line inscription of seven signs (probably to be categorised as a group of three syllabic signs, then a word divider followed by three more syllabic signs): see Figure 1.2. The inscription

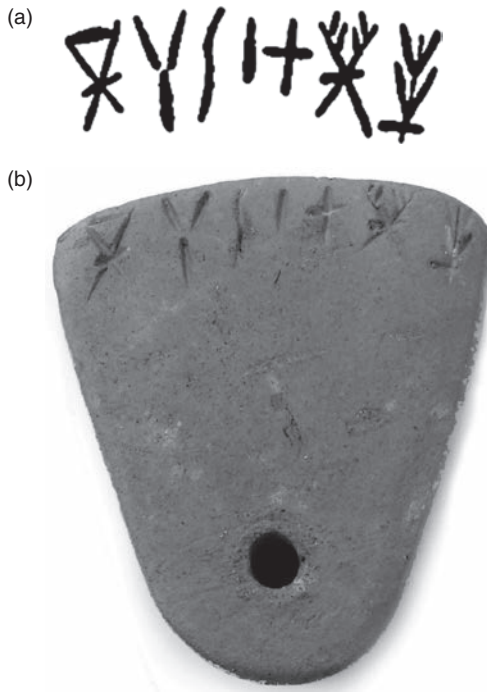


Figure 1.2 Enkomi clay label ##095.

²⁸ Already by the excavator, Dikaios (1969–71) 883.

²⁹ On the theory that the text is boustrophedon (first line sinistrovers, second line dextrovers, third line sinistrovers), see Janko (1987).

³⁰ Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 63.

³¹ See Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 136–9 and 204–6. The tablet from Pyla-Kokkinokremos is to be published by Athanasia Kanta and Massimo Perna.

was incised before firing. Although it has traditionally been classified as a ‘weight’, Ferrara has pointed out that it is better understood in the context of similar objects from Crete that function not as weights but as labels: these are small pieces of clay of varying shapes (often quite rounded and almost circular, or sometimes long and practically rectangular but rounded at the end), usually pierced with a hole, and bearing an inscription in Cretan Hieroglyphic (multiple examples, especially from the archives at Knossos and Mallia) or Linear A (one example, PH 9 from Phaistos).³² Furthermore, if ##095 were to be hung from its pierced hole in the manner of a weight, its inscription would be upside-down, suggesting that the interpretation as a label is more plausible. One could envisage that the user would tie the label to an object with string passed through the hole at the base, and would hold it up in order to read the inscription.

The label was excavated by Schaeffer in Enkomi’s Quartier 5E, to the east of a tholos tomb, but its exact context has never been very well described or published and so again some imprecision in its dating is inevitable: it is said by the excavators to belong to LCIA but this is difficult to verify.³³ The pinkish clay used in the label is quite different in appearance from that used to make the tablet ##001, although it may still be from a Cypriot clay source. Because we know so little about the label’s exact find spot, its context remains difficult to assess. Nevertheless, if it functions as some sort of label, then we might make a tacit assumption that its context was administrative, particularly going by Aegean parallels that were discovered in archival deposits.

The third object, ##225, is a cylinder seal made of steatite that bears a sequence of what seem to be four signs between various pictorial motifs including a human figure: see [Figure 1.3](#). Although it was not found in its original context, it originates from Gjerstad’s excavation of Enkomi tomb 2 and was dated by him on stylistic grounds to LCIA,³⁴ making this potentially the earliest example of Cypriot writing. Tomb 2 was in use from LCIB to at least LCIIA and contained remains from 11 individuals, with evidence for secondary treatment and collective reburial.³⁵ One other cylinder seal was found in the same tomb but does not bear Cypro-Minoan signs.

³² See Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 53–6.

³³ Schaeffer, Courtois and Lagarce (1968) 266 (fig. 3); see further Courtois (1984) 68 and 238 on the context (with a photograph, pl. 23) and Baurain (1980) on the dating.

³⁴ Gjerstad et al. (1934) 474–5 (pl. 76 no. 68). The object is not included by Olivier (2007); see Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 2 no. 225 (also vol. 1 53).

³⁵ See Keswani (2004) 158.



Figure 1.3 Enkomi cylinder seal #225.

Given that it was found in a tomb, the seal #225 can potentially be understood as a personal item belonging to a buried individual. However, it must also be viewed in the wider context of the usage of seals in Bronze Age Cyprus and alongside the earliest appearances of similar objects at Enkomi, which seems to have been the first significant producer of glyptic devices in Cyprus. Steatite, as a relatively soft but quite long-lasting stone, was a common choice for cylinder seals in both the Near East and Cyprus, and in Cyprus it has traditionally been associated with the simpler designs grouped by Porada under the ‘Common Style’; harder stones such as haematite or more valuable ones such as the highly prized lapis lazuli were associated with more intricate designs in Porada’s classification.³⁶ Cylinder seals were undoubtedly an object type borrowed from the Near East, where they first appeared as early as the 4th millennium BC, but that does not mean that Cypriots necessarily used them for the same purposes. Indeed, some innovation is obvious in the decoration of these objects, with images and motifs that often recall the contemporary Aegean rather than the Near East: seal #225 is in fact a good example of this, with symbols such as bucrania, horns of consecration and X-marks that would look quite at home in an

³⁶ Porada (1948).

Aegean setting.³⁷ A lack of evidence for seal impressions and sealing practices in Late Bronze Age Cyprus prevents us from understanding the context of their usage. However, Webb has argued strongly for glyptic imagery as playing a significant role in power structures, with elites employing cylinder seals as markers of authority and practical tools in both ideological and economic control.³⁸

A theme emerges from this investigation into the three earliest surviving Cypriot inscriptions (##001, 095, 225), which are the only ones dated with certainty to the LCI period:³⁹ all three can be argued to have some relation to elite behaviour and/or administrative processes, at least one (or perhaps all?) of them potentially in connection with the copper industry. The clay tablet ##001 was found in proximity to evidence for copper working and could perhaps once have been part of some sort of filing system (otherwise, why the need to put an abbreviated reference to its content on its edge?). The clay label ##095 was found in a location that has not been well documented, but the object itself could be administrative in nature if we are to understand it as a label that would presumably have been used in contexts similar to those of its Aegean counterparts. Similarly, although the cylinder seal ##225 originates from a mortuary context, the object type itself potentially associates it with administrative control by elites and so with related administrative processes.

A link between the advent of writing on Cyprus and the vast economic and social changes that underpin the MCIII–LCI period would not be at all surprising. In fact, this is exactly what we might expect. Links between the inception of literacy and economic administration are well attested in the history of writing, as for example in the earliest appearance of cuneiform in Mesopotamia, developing from the ‘proto-writing’ of simple accounting

³⁷ On Aegean influences on particular stylistic features in Cypriot seals, see Pini (1979) and (1980), Weingarten (1996). On the ‘hybridisation’ of Aegean and Levantine imagery in cylinder seal decoration, see Knapp (2008) 274–7. On the differences of usage and development between seals in Crete and Cyprus, see Webb and Weingarten (2012).

³⁸ Webb (2005).

³⁹ Three other inscriptions that could in theory be as early as the ones described above have been excluded from this discussion. These are three objects that are included in Ferrara’s corpus (2012/13 vol. 2) but were not included by Olivier (2007), and all three are dated quite imprecisely. One is a pottery handle found at Dhenia belonging to the broad period LCI–II, ##221, which Ferrara lists as having two signs followed by a word divider and then another sign; however the signs are all ‘plus’-shaped (+), which could be reminiscent of Cypro-Minoan sign 005  but is perhaps more likely to belong to the longstanding (and probably illiterate or para-literate) tradition of potmarking, whereby pots and especially their handles were marked with series of lines and crosses (on potmarks generally see Hirschfeld (2008)). The other two are also on ceramic objects: the bottom of a bowl found at Klavdia (##231), marked with two signs and dated via the known use of the type of ware to LCIA or LCIIIC–IIIA (so in all probability a much later artefact), and a pottery handle from Kalopsidha (##235) with a short but damaged inscription, a surface find discovered out of context and consequently dated broadly to LCI–II(?).

documents. As the copper-based economy of MCIII–LCI Cyprus grew, the processes of copper production would have intensified and required closer supervision by those overseeing the industry. Since they were benefiting directly from the production and export of the commodity, the elites themselves (i.e. the individuals or groups who came out on top in what appears to be an increasingly hierarchical society) would have had a keen interest in monitoring the industry and so the source of their own wealth and power. Thus writing could have been adopted primarily as a practical tool for overseeing copper production by allowing, for example, amounts or allocations to be recorded. The transition from a practical tool to a symbolic one could also have been straightforward, since elite individuals or groups (whether their power was derived from direct administrative control or more abstract ideological control, or a combination of both) would have needed to protect and control the industry that provided the key to their place at the top of the local hierarchy.⁴⁰

The fact that few numerals have been found in Cypro-Minoan inscriptions overall and none in the earliest inscriptions has sometimes been taken to militate against administrative use (also for the clay tablet #001 in particular⁴¹). If we were dealing with an exact parallel to the administrative documents of Late Bronze Age Crete and mainland Greece then such an observation might have some value, as Linear A and Linear B records ubiquitously use numerals (alongside ideograms) to designate amounts, even in situations where this might not necessarily be seen as a requirement (e.g. lists of individual items or people, where each will be listed with a numeral ‘1’). Cyprus, however, never seems to have adopted anything like the systematic notation of commodities and quantities witnessed in the Aegean. This need not be seen as an anomalous situation: compare, for instance, the lack of numerals in Greek alphabetic inscriptions until a system of notation was developed in the late 6th century BC. Even if Late Bronze Age Cypriots were working without a well-developed system of numerical notation in the Aegean style, it is still entirely possible that their clay tablets and other objects could have functioned successfully as administrative documents. It is also important to remember how few documents we are dealing with (just three for this period, and only some 250 for the whole period from LCI to CGII, i.e. the 17th to 10th centuries BC; see further [Chapter 3](#)), which makes it difficult to make assumptions about the employment of features such as numerical notation. This does not detract

⁴⁰ See also Knox (2008) on the suggestion that Cypro-Minoan emerged as part of a ‘package of elite self-definition’ based on an Aegean model (quote p. 10).

⁴¹ Godart and Sacconi (1979) 132.

from the wider impression that the beginning of writing in Cyprus seems to have coincided closely with the development and control of industry.⁴²

The derivation of the document types themselves, variously based on Aegean and/or Near Eastern models, could also be seen to fit in with the picture outlined above. Clay tablets with cuneiform inscriptions were in use in the Near East from the 4th millennium BC onwards, while in the Aegean clay tablets inscribed in Cretan Hieroglyphic and Linear A were first used in the first half of the 2nd millennium. Although it has unusual dimensions, the Cypriot tablet ##001 looks more in keeping with Aegean tablet types in its flat surface and method of incision. This could suggest some parallels in usage too: Aegean tablets were apparently restricted to administrative contexts while in Mesopotamia cuneiform-inscribed tablets had a much wider range of usage (including letters and belletristic texts as well as administrative ones). If the tablet ##001 was based on an Aegean model, might we assume that its use was in some way similar and so likely to be linked to the economy? Remember also that the use of an abbreviation on the tablet's edge, which conversely is a practice better attested in the Near East, further suggests the archival storage of information. The clay label ##095 again appears to be inspired by Aegean object types used for administrative purposes (confirmed in the Aegean cases sometimes by the use of ideograms and numerals), and in this case there is a lack of typological parallels within Near Eastern literate contexts. However, even if it is Aegean document types that seem to provide the model here, it is evident that there was no wholesale borrowing of Aegean administrative methods.

The cylinder seal ##225, on the other hand, has its only parallels in the Near East, and belongs to a relatively recently adopted tradition first attested in Cyprus at around the time of the MCIII–LCI transition. In contrast to the other two early inscriptions, here we have an object whose main purpose was *not* to carry writing. Seals were at first imported, but before long were produced in Cyprus itself, sometimes of local materials like steatite, calcite and haematite and sometimes of imported luxury materials like lapis lazuli, amethyst and carnelian. Most surviving Cypriot cylinder seals do not feature writing at all and contain only decorative motifs, but 22 have been found that bear Cypro-Minoan signs, of which ##225 is the earliest.⁴³ As has

⁴² See also Duhoux (2009a) 13–14.

⁴³ The others are ##193 (original object lost), 194 (reused Babylonian seal of lapis lazuli with a cuneiform inscription as well as a Cypro-Minoan one), 195 (haematite), 196 (original object lost), 197 (haematite), 198 (haematite), 199 (lapis lazuli, probably reused Babylonian), 200 (haematite), 201 (haematite), 202 (haematite), 203 (steatite), 204 (haematite), 205 (haematite), 217 (haematite), 218 (haematite), 220 (steatite), 226 (blue faience), 227 ('black stone'), 232 (buff faience), 252 (haematite), 253 (basalt).

been pointed out above, we do not have direct evidence to tell us how or for what Cypriots were using cylinder seals but the existence of intricately carved examples made of expensive imported materials strongly suggests a link with status or prestige. What that meant in terms of day-to-day usage is far more difficult to reconstruct, and it is impossible to verify the common assumption that seals would have been used to authenticate economic transactions in some way, as we know they were used in the Near East.

The three earliest inscriptions seem to fit in well with the model presented in [section 1.2](#) concerning the context of the adoption of writing on Cyprus: a tablet and a label that could be linked with administration and perhaps even the practical administration of the copper industry, and a cylinder seal that could be linked with elite ideology and/or control. This is where we must turn from the analysis of the inscriptions as objects to their analysis as pieces of writing, because an epigraphic study of these texts has something to add to our impression of the initial adoption of and early developments in Cypriot writing.

1.4 The Epigraphy of Early Cypriot Inscriptions

On closer inspection, and from an epigraphic rather than a contextual point of view, the three earliest Cypriot inscriptions present us with something of a mystery. Let us begin with the clay tablet, ##001, which has long been acknowledged to diverge substantially in epigraphic terms (i.e. its sign repertoire) from the rest of the corpus of Bronze Age Cypriot inscriptions. The tablet was already isolated by É. Masson as one of her ‘archaic repertoire’, partly on the basis of the extent to which its signs differ from the standard repertoire known for other Cypro-Minoan texts.⁴⁴ Olivier, however, isolated ##001 alone as possibly representing a ‘rameau mort de l’évolution de l’écriture syllabique’, i.e. a stage of writing that is not closely related to the development of other known forms of Cypro-Minoan, and labelled it as ‘CM0’.⁴⁵ More recently, Ferrara has stressed the importance of studying the whole body of inscriptions and seeing divergences as largely palaeographic rather than epigraphic, and consequently not only did not mark out the tablet for special treatment but also suggested that it does belong to the same tradition of writing as the later inscriptions.⁴⁶ More recently still, Valério has sought to establish more closely, through

⁴⁴ See É. Masson (1987).

⁴⁵ Olivier (2007) 21. The label ‘CM0’ is in line with the numbered classifications for other Cypro-Minoan inscriptions devised by É. Masson: see below.

⁴⁶ Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 220.

palaeographic study, the links between Linear A and Cypro-Minoan signs, and has argued specifically for the tablet ##001 that its script can be seen as an early stage in the development of Cypro-Minoan from Linear A.⁴⁷ A re-examination of the epigraphic features of this inscription will demonstrate the central problem and the issues underpinning these different points of view.

First it is worth considering how we might go about evaluating epigraphic divergence from known Cypro-Minoan. There are only about 250 attested Cypro-Minoan inscriptions, most of which are very short and/or fragmentary. Thus our knowledge of Cypro-Minoan is based on an extremely limited amount of evidence, so much so that not only is it undeciphered, but also it is considered undecipherable in its current state.⁴⁸ The inscriptions that have survived are furthermore characterised by a great level of diversity in terms of date (16th–10th centuries BC, i.e. over 500 years or more), origin (texts found all over the island and also at Ugarit and Tiryns), object type (tablets, cylinders, balls, jewellery items, pottery, seals, statuettes, etc.), material (objects made of clay, bronze, gold, ivory, glass, etc.) and method of inscription (signs incised, impressed, painted, etc.).⁴⁹ Some smaller groups within the corpus have furthermore been categorised as epigraphically or geographically divergent: É. Masson in the 1970s devised the labels of ‘CM2’ to refer to three long clay tablets from Enkomi that have a different repertoire of signs, ‘CM3’ to refer to the inscriptions found outside of Cyprus at Ugarit in the northern Levant, and ‘CM1’ to refer to everything else.⁵⁰ The efficacy of her categorisations is not the central issue here, and they have been discussed and critiqued at length elsewhere.⁵¹ However, it is important to remember that the body of inscriptions that we refer to as ‘Cypro-Minoan’ is far from being a single and discrete entity.

The diversity of Cypro-Minoan inscriptions raises the question: how do we make a useful comparison between the Enkomi tablet ##001 and the rest of the corpus, when that corpus is so diverse? It is important to proceed with caution.

The tablet #001 contains 20 different signs, with very few repetitions. Of these signs, some are known in other Bronze Age Cypriot inscriptions but others are not. Some of the signs (both ones that do and ones that do not otherwise correspond to known Cypro-Minoan signs) also have obvious

⁴⁷ Valério (2017). See also Valério (2016).

⁴⁸ See Duhoux (2013).

⁴⁹ Chapter 3 looks at the Cypro-Minoan corpus in more detail, and see also Steele (2012).

⁵⁰ The groups are presented most fully in É. Masson (1972) and (1974).

⁵¹ E.g. Steele (2013) ch. 1, and especially 30–5 (section I.1.D.ii), and (2014a), and Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 and (2013). See also Chapter 3 of this volume, section 3.2.2.

parallels in Linear A (which may be the script from which Cypro-Minoan is directly descended; see [section 1.6](#) below). [Table 1.2](#) sets out a tentative set of correspondences for each of the signs appearing in the tablet.

Table 1.2 Sign correspondences of Enkomi tablet #001.^a

Signs of tablet #001 (CM0 numeration – see Olivier (2007) 60–1)	Correspondences with other known Cypro- Minoan signs	Correspondences with Linear A signs
01	087	-
02	102	AB 08
03	082	AB 31
04	008	AB 05
05	-	-
06	-	AB 54
07	005	AB 02
08	069	-
09	-	AB 77
10/11	-	-
12	-	AB 55
13	007	AB 04
14	044	AB 09
15	023	AB 37
16	-	AB 30
17	-	-
18	-	-
19	-	-
20	-	-
21	104	AB 28

^a The signs are drawn after the sign tables in Olivier (2007) 412, 413, and the palaeographic charts in *GORILA* vol. 5.

Again a note of caution is necessary, because the correspondences shown in [Table 1.2](#) are based almost exclusively on the superficial, visual similarity of signs in the scripts under consideration and it is difficult to check them by any other means. Both Cypro-Minoan and Linear A remain undeciphered to different extents, which means that we cannot easily confirm the correspondences by comparing the phonetic value of the signs. However, by taking a broader view and with some detective work we can in some cases use signs in related scripts to support our assumptions. For example, CM0 sign 21  looks superficially close to CM sign 104 , but the parallel in Linear A usually has only one vertical stroke at the bottom of the sign rather than two (AB 28 )⁵², as does its known Linear B counterpart (*i* ).⁵² If we also compare the later Cypriot Syllabic sign for *i* , we can see that it shares both a superficial similarity with CM 104  (though simplified via a phenomenon sometimes known as ‘H > X reduction’) and a phonetic value with Linear B *i* , which in turn suggests that we have a full and close correspondence between the signs in the four scripts (Linear A 28 , Linear B *i* , Cypro-Minoan 104  and Cypriot Syllabic *i* ). We may add that a study of the appearances of Cypro-Minoan sign 104  reveals that it occurs far more often at the beginning of Cypro-Minoan words than in any other position, which makes it very likely that this is a vowel-only syllabic sign (e.g. *a*, *e*, *i*, etc., rather than representing a combination of consonant + vowel, e.g. *ta*, *pe*, *ki*).⁵³ The pieces of the jigsaw puzzle fit together to suggest that the signs in the four scripts shared the same basic phonetic value, as well as all being related to each other. We may conclude that we are right in putting not only Cypro-Minoan sign 104  but also Linear A sign AB 28  down in our table as correspondences for CM0 sign 21  even though the Linear A correspondence diverges in the number of strokes in the bottom part of the sign.

Some of the correspondences in [Table 1.2](#) are more certain than others:⁵⁴ for example, as shown in the previous paragraph, we have sufficient information via a comparative approach to link sign 21  with counterparts in both Linear A and Cypro-Minoan (the same approach confirms the correspondences for 04 , 07 , 14  and 15 )⁵⁴, but, at the other end of the spectrum, can we be certain that 13  corresponds to Cypro-Minoan sign 007  and Linear A sign AB 04 ? Furthermore, have we correctly

⁵² On the relationship between Linear A and Linear B sign values, which in many cases should be considered to be very close to one another, see Steele and Meißner (2017).

⁵³ See Steele (2013) 53–5.

⁵⁴ See also Duhoux (2009a) 20–2 for a slightly different approach.

identified 03  as being related to Cypro-Minoan sign 082  and Linear A sign AB 31  rather than, perhaps, Cypro-Minoan sign 004  and Linear A sign AB 01 ?⁵⁵ And is 02  better understood as being related to Cypro-Minoan sign 102  and Linear A sign 08  rather than to Cypro-Minoan sign 103  (with no certain Linear A correspondence)?

Because the Enkomi tablet #001 is epigraphically isolated and has no known parallels, we can only draw tentative conclusions about how its signs are related to other known scripts. However, if we assume that the correspondences given in Table 1.2 are correct, then we may observe that:

- eight of its signs have correspondences in both Cypro-Minoan and Linear A
- two of its signs have correspondences only in Cypro-Minoan
- four of its signs have correspondences only in Linear A
- six of its signs do not have correspondences in either Cypro-Minoan or Linear A.

What are we to make of such a distribution? The answer necessarily relies on assumptions that we make about the other scripts as well. If we assume that we have reasonably complete knowledge of the sign repertoires of Linear A and Cypro-Minoan, then this single inscription appears to diverge sufficiently from both of them to state that it is neither Linear A nor Cypro-Minoan, although it is probably related to both.

The above line of reasoning constitutes quite a cautious approach to the problem of the script used in clay tablet #001. While this is preferred by the present author, it is important to note that some other studies have attempted to push the boundaries of our understanding further. In particular, Valério has suggested a much more complete set of correspondences for the tablet's signs, identifying Cypro-Minoan and Linear A cognates for most signs based on a palaeographic study.⁵⁶ That is to say that by looking at the degree of variation in attestations of each sign in each script, he has been able to find variants of particular Cypro-Minoan and Linear A signs that look close to the signs found in the tablet in all but two instances; sometimes he finds close parallels in both scripts, while in other cases he presents an argument that the sign as found in #001 is 'intermediate' between one in Linear A and one in Cypro-Minoan. One example of the latter is sign 09  in the tablet, whose gap at the bottom of

⁵⁵ Although CM0 sign 03  seems to 'point' in the wrong direction (as does sign 01  compared with its suggested counterpart), this would not be unexpected if Janko (1987) is correct that the inscription is boustrophedon and the first line reads from right to left.

⁵⁶ Valério (2017) and (2016) 179–94.

the circle he sees as part of ‘an increasing propensity to open the sign at its lower edge’ in comparison to a Linear A sign, AB 77 , that is often circular (like its Linear B counterpart, which is fully circular more often than not) but sometimes also has a small gap at the bottom. The eventual outcome of this sign, in Valério’s view, is Cypro-Minoan sign 025 , which is more pointed at the apex and never appears as a complete circle.⁵⁷ A final step in the argument is that the sign *ka*  in the later Cypriot Syllabary could potentially be seen as a further development from Cypro-Minoan 025, while preserving the same value as the Linear B sign *ka* related to Linear A sign AB 77. Following Valério’s reasoning, one could even use his Linear A and Cypro-Minoan correspondences (since they are closely related to the deciphered scripts Linear B and the Cypriot Syllabary respectively) to suggest a tentative reading of the tablet: something like (reading from the signs on the edge and then in boustrophedon from the top right corner) *ja-ro // ja-ro-wa?-to-sa-a-ra-//-ka-ru-re-nu-te-ti-i-ne-e-ta-zu?-ni* (*inf. mut.*).

There are however some criticisms that could be made of such a positivist approach. Attention to palaeographic variation is of great importance in studying writing systems that are attested in only small numbers of inscriptions, but at the same time the small number of attestations makes it difficult to understand the degree of variation. Palaeographic variation only makes sense in context: a particular written sign has certain properties of which some will remain stable while others will vary to different degrees, and the underlying reason behind each variation may differ. The ‘ductus’ of a sign is affected by the technique used to write it (e.g. incising, impressing, painting), the material on which it is written (stone, metal, hard or soft clay, etc.), the type or register of the text (formal, informal, decorative), the level of experience (professional, amateur) and personal traits (neatness, flourishes, etc.) of the author and so on. For Linear A we have at least some indication that particular inscriptions belong to administrative archival practice (e.g. clay tablets) while others seem to fall outside of this sphere of use (e.g. inscriptions on jewellery or libation tables), and so can say a bit more about the context in which they are written and how that might affect palaeographic variation.⁵⁸ For Cypro-Minoan we have far fewer certain administrative texts (e.g. only a handful of clay tablets) alongside many

⁵⁷ Valério (2017) with fig. 8.17. Note however that AB 77 often is not closed at the bottom, and so sign 09 in the tablet cannot easily be seen as a progressive form in comparison with the Linear A: it is in fact very close in shape to most variants of AB 77.

⁵⁸ On palaeographic variation and administrative and non-administrative contexts, see Steele (2017).

whose function we often do not understand (e.g. see [Chapter 3 section 3.2.3](#) on the clay balls). With small numbers of texts and attested individual signs, palaeographic variation can be observed but is difficult to analyse. So even if attention to palaeographic variation can begin to give us some answers (e.g. that a particular variant exists in one script and may be related to something similar-looking in another), it also presents some problems of its own.

Even the identification of individual signs is not without difficulty. Unfortunately, our understanding of the sign repertoire of Cypro-Minoan is not necessarily as complete as is often assumed. If we consult Olivier's sign table (see [Table 1.3](#)), we have the impression that 'CM1' (the version of the script in which the majority of inscriptions are assumed to be written) is composed of 72 syllabograms, compared with 61 in CM2 and 50 in CM3.⁵⁹ The CM2 documents, which comprise three long tablets of the same type, location and date, containing more than 1,300 syllabograms in total, can be assumed to attest the whole or nearly the whole repertoire of the script in which they are written (which is why it is often thought to be a different script from 'CM1').⁶⁰ However, even though 'CM1' has produced a comparable total number of signs, its attestations are spread over more than 200 inscriptions, most of which are very short and/or fragmentary, covering a chronological span of probably more than 500 years. The longest 'CM1' inscription is a clay cylinder from Enkomi dated to LCIIA–B and contains only 203 syllabograms in total over 27 lines of text, with only 39 different signs (+ 1 uncertain) represented. This text is too short to assume that it represents the whole sign repertoire of the script in which it is written, but equally it is very difficult to be certain how much of that whole sign repertoire is missing from the inscription. It is also difficult to compare any one 'CM1' inscription with another, because most of them are so short (typically fewer than ten signs in total), and because in absolute terms it is impossible to prove that, say, one inscription dating from LCIIA and bearing five signs is written in the same script as an inscription from LCIIIC and bearing five different signs.

Overall there are too many uncertainties, too much diversity and too few inscriptions to give a coherent picture of the 'CM1' signary. We might even question whether 'CM1' is a valid concept outside its usefulness as a catch-all term to refer to inscriptions that are neither written in the CM2 signary (assuming this is a distinct script at all) nor from Ugarit (i.e. CM3, for

⁵⁹ Olivier (2007) 414–16.

⁶⁰ See Olivier (2008) 607.

Table 1.3 Cypro-Minoan sign grid, after Olivier (2013) 10.

	A	CM 1	CM 2	CM 3	CC		A	CM 1	CM 2	CM 3	CC		A	CM 1	CM 2	CM 3	CC
001	I	I	I	I	I	040		...	...	⊖		079		...	𐀓	...	
002		𐀀	...	𐀁		041		𐀂𐀃	...	...		080		...	𐀄	...	
004	𐀅	𐀆	𐀇	𐀈	𐀉	044	𐀊	𐀋𐀌	𐀍	𐀎	𐀏	081		𐀐	𐀑	𐀒	
005	+	+	+	+	+	046	𐀔	𐀕𐀖𐀗	...	...	𐀘	082	𐀙	𐀚𐀛	𐀜	𐀝𐀞	𐀟𐀠
006	𐀡	𐀢	𐀣	𐀤	𐀥	047		...	𐀦	...		083		𐀧	...	...	𐀨𐀩
007	𐀪	𐀫	...	𐀬		049		...	𐀭	...		084		𐀮	...	...	
008	𐀯	𐀰𐀱	𐀲	𐀳	𐀴𐀵	050		𐀶𐀷𐀸	...	𐀹		085		𐀺𐀻𐀼	...	...	
009		𐀽	𐀾	𐀿	𐁀	051		...	𐁁	𐁂		086		𐁃	...	...	𐁄
010		...	𐁅	...		052		...	𐁆	...		087	𐁇	𐁈𐁉	𐁊	𐁋	𐁌
011		𐁍	𐁎	𐁏	𐁐	053		𐁑𐁒	...	𐁓		088		𐁔𐁕𐁖	...	...	
012	𐁗	𐁘𐁙	𐁚	...	𐁛𐁜	054		...	𐁝	...		089		...	𐁞	...	
012b		𐁟	...	...		055		𐁠𐁡	...	𐁢		090		...	𐁣	...	
013	𐁤	𐁥𐁦	𐁧	𐁨	𐁩	056		𐁪	𐁫	𐁬		091		𐁭𐁮𐁯	𐁰	𐁱𐁲	𐁳
015		𐁴	...	...	𐁵	058		...	...	𐁶		092		𐁷	𐁸𐁹	𐁺𐁻	
017		𐁼	...	...		059		𐁽𐁾	𐁿	...		094		...	...	𐂀	
019		𐂁𐂂	...	𐂃𐂄		060		...	𐂅	...		095	𐂆	𐂇	𐂈	𐂉	
021		𐂊𐂋	𐂌	𐂍𐂎		061		𐂏𐂐	𐂑	...	𐂒	096		𐂓𐂔	𐂕𐂖	𐂗	
023	𐂘	𐂙	𐂚𐂛	𐂜	𐂝	062		...	𐂞	...		097	𐂟	𐂠𐂡𐂢	𐂣𐂤	𐂥	𐂦
024		𐂧	𐂨	...	𐂩𐂪	063		𐂫	...	...		098		...	...	𐂬	
025		𐂭	𐂮	𐂯		064		𐂰𐂱	𐂲	...	𐂳	099		𐂴𐂵	...	𐂶	
026	𐂷	𐂸	...	...		066		...	𐂹	...	𐂺	100		...	...	𐂻𐂼	
027		𐂽𐂾𐂿	𐃀	𐃁	𐃂𐃃	067		𐃄𐃅𐃆	...	...	𐃇	101		𐃈	...	...	
028	𐃉	𐃊𐃋	𐃌	𐃍		068	𐃎	𐃏𐃐	𐃑𐃒	...		102	𐃓	𐃔𐃕	𐃖	𐃗	𐃘
029		...	𐃙	...		069		𐃚𐃛	𐃜𐃝	𐃞		103		𐃟	...	𐃠	
030		𐃡	𐃢	...		070	𐃣	𐃤𐃥	𐃦	𐃧𐃨	𐃩	104		𐃪𐃫	𐃬	𐃭	𐃮
033		𐃯𐃰	𐃱	...	𐃲	071		...	...	𐃴𐃵		105		...	...	𐃶	
034		𐃷𐃸	...	...		072		𐃹	𐄀	...		107		𐄁𐄂𐄃	𐄄	...	𐄅𐄆
035		𐄇𐄈	𐄉	𐄊𐄋	𐄌𐄍	073		𐄎𐄏𐄐	𐄑𐄒	𐄓𐄔		108		𐄕𐄖	...	...	
036		𐄗𐄘	𐄙	𐄚𐄛		074		...	𐄜	𐄝		109		𐄞𐄟	...	...	𐄠𐄡
037		𐄢	𐄣	𐄤𐄥	𐄦𐄧𐄨	075	𐄩	𐄪𐄫𐄬	𐄭	𐄮	𐄯𐄰	110		𐄱𐄲𐄳	𐄴	𐄵𐄶	𐄷𐄸
038	𐄹	𐄺𐄻𐄼𐄽	𐄾	𐄿		076		...	𐅀	...		112		𐅁	...	...	𐅂
039		𐅃𐅄	...	...	𐅅	078		...	𐅆	...		114		𐅇𐅈	...	...	

which the statistics are even gloomier than for ‘CM1’ because of the very small number of inscriptions, relatively long by ‘CM1’ standards but very short by CM2 standards: only eight inscriptions and some 250 signs in total between them).⁶¹ Even if we abandon a variegated view of Cypro-Minoan writing altogether and see all the ‘CM1’, CM2 and CM3 inscriptions as being written in a single script, it does not solve the problem of the heterogeneity of the inscriptions and the degree of palaeographic variation of individual signs.

The uncertainties related to the overall Cypro-Minoan repertoire of signs (especially for ‘CM1’) make it very difficult to judge the CM0 Enkomi tablet ##001. Considering the small number of surviving Cypro-Minoan inscriptions, some relevant signs or sign variants could very well be missing by chance, although we may hope that future finds help to shed further light on the problem. Even the better-attested script Linear A, with some 1,500 documents surviving compared to some 250 in Cypro-Minoan, only relatively recently produced an example of a sign related to Linear B *nwa* (AB 48), which had been missing only by chance from all other known inscriptions.⁶² On the other hand, it seems significant that an inscription containing only 23 signs in total (20 different signs) has so few signs that share obviously comparable shapes with signs attested in other Cypriot inscriptions (only 10 according to the cautious analysis offered in [Table 1.2](#)). If these are signs that do not feature in other Cypro-Minoan inscriptions, then it could point towards ‘CM0’ being a separate writing system,⁶³ while if these 10 are related to other known Cypro-Minoan signs but look quite different from attested examples of them then there is still a gap, even if it is only a palaeographic one and not a systemic one.

We can consider this problem from another viewpoint by asking: how can we tell whether ##001 is the only example of the script in which it is written? For example, can we tell whether the other inscriptions of comparable date, ##095 and ##225, are written in the same script or not? The clay label, ##095, contains six syllabograms. As with the tablet ##001 above, we can show its sign correspondences in tabular form ([Table 1.4](#)).

Judging the label’s signs by superficial similarity, we can note that all of them have reasonably good parallels with ones found in other Cypro-Minoan inscriptions, which has led Olivier to group it with ‘CM1’, rejecting

⁶¹ See further Steele (2013) 30–5; also Steele (2012) on the diversity of ‘CM1’.

⁶² See Olivier (2013) 8–9.

⁶³ Compare the approach taken in Steele (2014a).

Table 1.4 Sign correspondences of Enkomi label ##095.

Signs of label ##095	Correspondences with the signs of tablet ##001	Correspondences with other known Cypro-Minoan signs	Correspondences with Linear A signs
1	-	097	-
2	03	082	AB 31
3	-	011	-
4	07	005	AB 02
5	-	108	-
6	-	064	-

its inclusion in É. Masson’s ‘archaic repertoire’.⁶⁴ The only significant differences are found in the fifth and sixth signs, which look quite different from other attested examples of signs 108 (though the label’s fifth sign could be explained as a development via ‘H > X reduction’) and 064 (which does not usually have a central vertical line as in the label’s sixth sign⁶⁵). Comparing the label with the tablet #001 alone is less helpful because of the short length of both inscriptions. Two signs look palaeographically very close to ones appearing in the tablet (the second and fourth signs in the label: see Table 1.4) while the other four do not appear in the tablet at all. Considering that the surviving fragment of #001 contains only 20 signs out of a repertoire that must have been considerably larger than the number of signs attested in these inscriptions (related syllabaries of this type typically containing between 50 and 100 signs in total), it is impossible to state with certainty that ##095 was or was not composed in the same script as #001 – although equally it remains impossible to state the opposite. The length of the inscriptions is simply too short to allow a definitive statement to be made.

Similarly, an examination of the stone cylinder seal ##225 reveals some correspondence with the signs found in the tablet #001 (Table 1.5).

In this case again two signs may be shared with the tablet, although in the tablet the palaeographic variant of its sign 13 is very different (if it is the same sign at all), while in the cylinder seal it is much closer to what we see in other Cypro-Minoan inscriptions (007). The first two signs of the inscription have no obvious parallel in either Linear A or Cypro-Minoan,

⁶⁴ In Olivier (2007).
⁶⁵ Valério (2017) considers this a variant of sign 037 .

Table 1.5 Sign correspondences of Enkomi seal ##225.

Signs of cylinder seal ##095	Correspondences with the signs of tablet ##001	Correspondences with other known Cypro-Minoan signs	Correspondences with Linear A signs
1 	-	-	-
2 	-	-	-
3 	15 	023 	AB 37 
4 	13 	007 	AB 04 

although the second sign **X** does resemble an otherwise unidentified sign found on a pottery fragment of unknown date from Enkomi ascribed to ‘CM1’, ##109: . Ferrara labels the first sign **Y** as an example of Cypro-Minoan sign 082 **Y**,⁶⁶ but this looks unlikely because 082 is a frequent sign that never features an extra horizontal stroke at the bottom. However, a much more likely explanation is that the first two ‘signs’ are not signs at all but rather are decorative motifs, very similar to the other motifs that appear next to the human figure on the seal. The first ‘sign’ **Y** is quite similar to the two bucrania that appear in the upper half of the seal, one above the horns of consecration and the other to the right of the ingot symbol, and both the bucranium and the X-shaped mark (**X**) find numerous comparanda among the decorative repertoire of Late Bronze Age Cypriot seals.⁶⁷ Figure 1.5 shows similar decorative images in a cylinder seal also found at Enkomi but dated later (probably LCII–III). Furthermore, the **Y** and **X** of ##225 are slightly larger than the **A** and **Z**, and the **X** extends upwards into the field of the other decorative images in the top half. We should almost certainly see this as a two-sign inscription (**AZ**), with both signs finding good parallels with later Cypro-Minoan signs 023 and 007 (both signs also finding parallels in Linear A and possibly both in the clay tablet ##001). It is again impossible to state with certainty that this very short inscription is not written in the same script as the tablet ##001, but it is important to remember that its context is very different: the two syllabograms are

⁶⁶ See Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 2 no. 225.

⁶⁷ For example, see the Common Style cylinder seals illustrated in Webb (2002) 125. An ‘X’-shaped symbol also features commonly in Cretan Hieroglyphic seal inscriptions where it is often interpreted as an indicator of reading direction, a form of punctuation or simply a marker of the presence of writing more generally (though, with the possible exception of CHIC #201 and #294, it is almost always smaller in size than accompanying sign sequences); I am indebted to Roeland Decorte for this observation.

integrated into the broader image on the seal, and while they are likely to represent a word (perhaps the name of the seal's owner?), they also in such a context have value as part of the seal's decoration. We do not have to assume that the seal's owner was literate, but it appears that he was intentionally making reference to the technology of writing in his seal, which probably also has ideological significance since writing and literacy at this stage would almost certainly have been somewhat restricted.

An examination of the three earliest inscriptions from Cyprus reveals that they are very difficult to classify epigraphically. Although the basis on which É. Masson assumed that there was a separate 'archaic repertoire' was unreliable, it is impossible to be certain that these three inscriptions are not all written in the same script: we simply have too little evidence to prove the

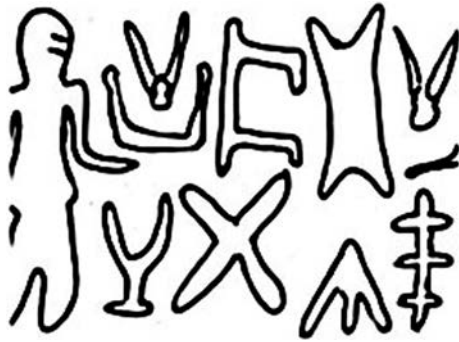


Figure 1.4 Enkomi cylinder seal #225 (cut down version of [Figure 1.3](#)).



Figure 1.5 Impression of a cylinder seal from Enkomi, LCII–III.

case one way or the other. Nevertheless, we can at least say that the clay tablet ##001 is written in a script with a repertoire that looks in some sense different from that of other later Cypro-Minoan inscriptions. This is not because the tablet contains so few of the signs known in other inscriptions, but rather because it contains so many signs (10 out of 20 in total, or 50%) that are not known, or that look very different, in other inscriptions. In such a short inscription, this is remarkable. The other two early inscriptions, ##095 and ##225, however, are impossible to classify conclusively because of their short length, but their signs appear to conform well to signs known in the later Cypro-Minoan repertoire.

1.5 The Context of the Earliest Cypriot Writing

The previous section (1.4) has demonstrated some of the problems with analysing the writing system used in the earliest phase of writing on Cyprus. The clay tablet ##001 is visibly different from other surviving Cypriot inscriptions, but whether that is a difference of script repertoire or a reflection of significant palaeographic variation is just one of the questions surrounding early Cypriot literacy. Do the tablet's peculiar features stem from the earliest process of script adaptation on the island? Are the label ##095 and cylinder seal ##225 written in exactly the same script as the tablet or not? And if not, does this point towards multiple adaptations of writing in the LCI period? Bringing epigraphic and contextual studies together can help us to think about how to resolve such problems.

As we saw in [section 1.3](#), it is important to consider not only epigraphic features of the three earliest inscriptions but also their object type. Most importantly, the clay tablet ##001 gives every appearance of having some relation to written administrative procedures: administration is the primary use of clay tablets in the Late Bronze Age Near East and Aegean, the two repeated signs on the edge of the tablet look like a means of referring to the content without having to read the rest of the inscription (a 'filing system?'), the object was found near evidence of copper smelting (i.e. a potential link with areas used for industry) and the text is ruled in neat lines, a common feature of some Aegean counterparts. Considering that it is broken at the bottom, it is furthermore impossible to be certain that it did not once contain numerals or other features associated with accounting-type documents.

If the tablet does not look exactly like a Linear A or B or cuneiform accounting document, this need not surprise us. LCI Cyprus, for all that it may have been dominated by a single pre-eminent power in this period (or

not, depending on one's interpretation of the archaeological evidence, for which see [section 1.2](#) above), shows no direct signs of centralised economy types based around building complexes, as are well attested in 3rd- and 2nd-millennium BC Mesopotamia, and in Minoan Crete and Mycenaean Greece during the 2nd millennium. What have survived may well represent smaller-scale accounting, perhaps relating primarily to some overseeing of the copper and metalworking industry in particular centres, especially Enkomi. Otherwise we might expect more extensive signs of archives, as we have for example at Minoan sites such as Hagia Triada and Phaistos; absence of evidence cannot be taken directly as evidence of absence, but the few clay tablets that have survived the Cypriot Late Bronze Age have not come from obvious archival contexts.⁶⁸ Without more evidence, the broader socio-political background of administrative uses of writing is difficult to pin down.

However we understand the broader context of attested writing in LCI, the document types themselves give every reason to assume that literacy at this stage stood in a close relationship with some sort of administrative or economic practice, as argued above ([section 1.3](#)). The tablet ##001 is particularly liable to be interpreted in this way, especially by Aegean parallels for clay tablet use. Indeed it has even been suggested that when writing was first adopted in Cyprus it was part of an administrative 'package' borrowed from the Aegean in conjunction with ideas such as the use of clay tablets for documentation purposes.⁶⁹ It seems quite unlikely from surviving evidence that a single, lasting archival tradition was ever established in Cyprus, given the great degree of variation in writing practice (e.g. methods of and implements used for incision) throughout the Late Bronze Age.⁷⁰ Instead we should perhaps think in terms of different smaller-scale contexts, probably changing significantly over time and not necessarily with any great degree of continuity, in which documents such as clay tablets may have been used to record administrative or economic information. The clay tablet ##001 may constitute one of the earliest pieces of evidence for such a situation.

⁶⁸ The tablet ##001 and the CM2 tablets ##207–9 were each found in isolated contexts, and although the latter give every appearance of belonging to the same writing tradition, there is no direct evidence for how they were stored. The CM3 tablets ##212–15 from Ugarit belong to an archival tradition, but an Ugaritic (and predominantly cuneiform) one that does not reflect Cypriot practice. The best potential evidence for an archival use of Cypro-Minoan clay tablets comes from the new finds (two tablets) from Pyla-Kokkinokremos dated to the 13th century BC (see Karageorghis and Kanta (2012) 110–11; the tablets are to be published by Athanasia Kanta and Massimo Perna).

⁶⁹ Knox (2008).

⁷⁰ Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 211–13.

One significant feature of the tablet is that it has two signs on its right edge. The direction of writing of the first line has been interpreted convincingly as *sinistroverse* (i.e. right to left, after which the tablet continues *boustrophedon*, with alternating direction of reading),⁷¹ and so the two signs on the edge repeat the first two signs of the inscription, making them in all likelihood an abbreviated reference to its content as noted above. Furthermore, these two repeated signs on the right edge have somewhat more shallow incisions and so appear to have been written when the clay was drier some time after the inscription was made on the tablet's face, quite possibly by a different writer considering the small but distinct palaeographic differences in the shapes of each sign (  on the tablet's face but   on the right edge).⁷² This suggests a filing system of some kind. But if the tablet belongs to some sort of 'organized, deposit system', then in what sense can it also represent a 'period of experimentation' with writing, as has been suggested based on its epigraphic peculiarities?⁷³ Indeed, if this object belongs to any formal administrative system, we might assume that it is written in a script that is already well established for this purpose: there is no point in having a filing system unless multiple documents are being produced, perhaps by multiple individuals and to be read by multiple individuals. The possible involvement of a second author in tablet ##001 lends some weight to this hypothesis. This strongly implies that the script used in the tablet was sufficiently standardised to be useful in such a tradition, and so we must envisage a situation in which a single writing system was deliberately being promulgated for a specific administrative purpose – however limited and short-lived that situation might have been.

As we saw above (section 1.4), from an epigraphic point of view it is difficult to be certain that the clay label ##095 is, or is not, written in the same script as the tablet ##001, although it bears close similarities with later Cypro-Minoan. From a contextual point of view, we might suggest that, since it is also an administrative document-type going by Aegean parallels, and given that it originates from the same site in the LCI period, it could belong to the same administrative situation. On the other hand, given that neither object has been dated very precisely, there could be something of a chronological gap between the two, which would give room for changing practices. What is odd is that, in as far as we can assign a date to either item given their difficult excavation histories, the label is likely to be an earlier

⁷¹ Janko (1985).

⁷² See also Duhoux (2009a) 13–14.

⁷³ Quotations from Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 63 and 61 respectively.

item than the tablet. Whether or not we can make a good case for both inscriptions being written in the same script (i.e. a system of writing with a single repertoire of signs), the fact that they look palaeographically quite different cannot be ignored. Do they belong to two different traditions of writing, or do they simply belong to a period or situation in which writing existed but had not yet been subject to processes that would create more standardised palaeographic features (such as scribal training, or the need for one person's 'handwriting' to be easily read by a number of other individuals)? This is not easy to answer.

The steatite cylinder seal ##225 is less problematic because of the object type itself. It may or may not have been used for administrative purposes (remembering that we have very little evidence for what cylinder seals were used for in Late Bronze Age Cyprus), but the object itself is very clearly inspired by the existence of cylinder seals in Near Eastern literate societies. Whether or not we make a case for a specific economic or administrative role in parallel with Near Eastern uses (e.g. the authentication of economic transactions), the inscription itself originates from the context not of the seal's use but of its creation: typologically it would be likely that the inscription refers to the individual to whom the object belongs, and in this sense it could be seen as a personal item, an impression reinforced by the discovery of ##225 in a tomb. Even more importantly, we saw in [section 1.4](#) that it is not very easy to tell the difference, at first sight, between script signs and pictorial symbols in the seal's carved decoration. While it may communicate information (i.e. the seal owner's name, if that is what the written signs reflect), this is not an inscription that exists solely to convey information, and in this regard it can be seen at least in part as a decorative and/or ideological statement on the part of the presumably elite individual to whom it belonged.

We may conclude that the tablet ##001 at least must signify the existence of a well-established (if perhaps restricted) script, used for administrative purposes at LCI Enkomi, while the label ##095 and cylinder seal ##225 are difficult to reconcile with it from an epigraphic point of view. Variations in palaeographic realisations of signs and perhaps even in script repertoire could suggest that writing was being used for ad hoc purposes outside of a centrally standardised context, as pointed out above. However, 'standardised' is simply a retrospective label applied to a tradition that looks in hindsight fairly homogeneous. The tablet ##001 very probably belonged to a context in which writing practices were locally standardised to the extent that some sort of filing system was in place for clay documents, but no further evidence has survived to confirm this. Whether or not the label ##095 and seal ##225

were associated with similar social or administrative contexts is equally impossible to verify.

While the epigraphic/palaeographic variation in evidence in the three surviving LCI documents makes it difficult to assess the nature of script in this period, it does not have to be problematic in terms of assessing the relationship between LCI writing and later Cypro-Minoan literacy. Indeed we might expect social, political and other changes over time to impact on the nature of literacy and the appearance of writing. For example, the partial destruction of the Enkomi Fortress building and the new outlook of the LCII period may represent change in the upper strata of Cypriot society and in the organisation of hierarchical control, which might explain why writing attested in later inscriptions from LCII onwards is strikingly different in appearance from that used in the LCI clay tablet *##001*.⁷⁴ If we see the script used in that tablet as formally distinct from the later writing system(s) (i.e. composed of a different repertoire of signs), we could even hypothesise that a decisive script reform at some point took place, which could have arisen from political or administrative change impacting on the use of writing.

1.6 External Influences on Cypriot Writing

Now that we have considered the context of the earliest appearances of writing on Cyprus from an internal point of view, we are in a better position to understand when the technology of writing was adopted, by whom and why. This allows us to return more confidently to the question of external stimulus, which, as was pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, has been a major preoccupation in the minds of scholars trying to understand Cypro-Minoan for more than 100 years. From where did Cypriots draw their inspiration when they first adopted the technology of writing and made it their own?

1.6.1 Linear A and Cypro-Minoan Writing Systems

One way of trying to answer this question is to look at the nature of the writing system and to assess its affinities with other known writing systems. As we have already seen, the inscriptions from the LCI period cannot provide any definitive answer because they are too short for the necessary extensive epigraphic analysis. The tablet *##001* is the longest of the early

⁷⁴ See Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 64–72 on the context of inscriptions from the early LCII period.

inscriptions, but with only 20 different signs we probably have considerably less than half of its script's repertoire attested. At face value it features some signs with shapes superficially very close to Linear A signs that otherwise do not seem to have been adopted on Cyprus (4 out of 20, or 20%; see [Table 1.2](#) above), and more than half of its signs have good Linear A parallels (at least 12 out of 20). The eight signs that do not have obvious Linear A parallels could lead us to assume that it is not a Linear A inscription, but nevertheless a close affiliation with Linear A is evident.

In evaluating Linear A as a source script for writing on Cyprus, another factor we can consider is how many signs are shared by Linear A and the repertoire of Cypro-Minoan as known from later inscriptions. We know already that it is no coincidence that some Cypro-Minoan signs superficially resemble Linear A signs, because by studying related deciphered scripts (Linear B, a direct descendant of Linear A, and the Cypriot Syllabary, a direct descendant of some form of Cypro-Minoan, both used to write Greek) we can observe that some of the shared signs had the same or very similar values. This fact was useful in our discussion of epigraphic features in [section 1.4](#) above (where the sign for *i* is discussed in detail), because it allowed more certainty in identifying related signs in Cypro-Minoan and Linear A. Some other signs may appear superficially close, but it is the ones where we can also match up related phonetic values on the Cretan and the Cypriot sides where we can allow more certainty.

A survey of the Cypro-Minoan signs that have **both** superficially similar correspondences in Linear A **and** matching corresponding values in Linear B and the Cypriot Syllabary, however, reveals only a very small number of signs that we can prove are related beyond doubt (see [Table 1.6](#)).

Most of the signs shown in the table are unproblematic and share very close correspondences in sign shape as well as value. For some we can observe some small changes in their shape between the different writing systems, for example the 'H > X reduction' resulting in the forms of *a* ✱ and *i* ✱ in the Cypriot Syllabary, and the more strongly asserted central stroke of the *ti* ⚓ sign in all scripts after Linear A. For some signs the correspondence in value leaves some uncertainties over the precise nature of the script developments, particularly in the case of the *da* or *ta* sign ⚓, and the *ro* or *lo* sign ✚ (see below). One of the signs, the *po* sign ⚓, also is not attested beyond doubt in Cypro-Minoan itself, but we can deduce from the signs of closely corresponding shape and value in Linear A, Linear B and the Cypriot Syllabary that this sign must be missing only by chance from

Table 1.6 Signs with corresponding shape and value in the Aegean linear scripts.

Linear A	Linear B	Cypro-Minoan	Cypriot Syllabary
 AB 01	 <i>da</i>	 004	 <i>ta</i>
 AB 02	 <i>ro/lo</i>	 005	 <i>lo</i>
 AB 03	 <i>pa</i>	 006	 <i>pa</i>
 AB 05	 <i>to</i>	 008	 <i>to</i>
 AB 06	 <i>na</i>	 013	 <i>na</i>
 AB 08	 <i>a</i>	 102	 <i>a</i>
 AB 09	 <i>se</i>	 044	 <i>se</i>
 AB 11	 <i>po</i>	- missing? -	 <i>po</i>
 AB 28	 <i>i</i>	 104	 <i>i</i>
 AB 31	 <i>sa</i>	 082	 <i>sa</i>
 AB 37	 <i>ti</i>	 023	 <i>ti</i>

attested Cypro-Minoan inscriptions.⁷⁵ However, overall these eleven signs provide reliable evidence that the Aegean linear scripts are closely related and that their adaptations always retained *some* sign values from earlier scripts: the corresponding shapes and values cannot be a coincidence.

The *da* or *ta* sign  and the *ro* or *lo* sign  present us with an interesting problem related to epigraphic developments.⁷⁶ Linear B has two features that look strange for a script that was adapted specifically to write the Greek language: it distinguishes /d/ from /t/ even though it does not distinguish voicing in any other series (i.e. /b/ is not represented separately from /p/, nor /g/ from /k/ nor /g^w/ from /k^w/), and it fails to distinguish between /l/ and /r/ (which are separate phonemes in Greek). We can almost certainly explain this by postulating that Linear B inherited these features from

⁷⁵ See Steele (2013) 71–3 for further discussion. Olivier (2013) 8 and Valério (2016) 170 consider Cypro-Minoan sign 012 to correspond with the *po* signs in other scripts.

⁷⁶ Also discussed in Steele (2014b).

Linear A, presumably because the (still unknown) language written in Linear A had a very different phonemic repertoire from Greek.⁷⁷ The philologist Lejeune suggested that both features might be explained by the ‘Minoan’ language having had a distinction between /l/ and /r/ phonemes that were quite different from the Greek ones: by his reckoning, the /l/ would be close to a [d] sound, and so was heard by Greeks as closer to their /d/ phoneme than their /l/ phoneme, which left them with only one set of signs (for the original Minoan /r/ phoneme) to represent both of their /l/ and /r/ phonemes; however, Lejeune could not explain why a Minoan /l/ sign would come out in the much later Cypriot Syllabary as a /t/ sign, and so postulated that Cypro-Minoan was not a direct descendant of Linear A, but rather Linear A and Cypro-Minoan were both descended from a common ancestor script of which all traces were lost.⁷⁸ This remains the only convincing reason for postulating that Cypro-Minoan and Linear A could be ‘sister’ scripts, but it cannot be confirmed with any degree of certainty; furthermore, it seems unlikely that a script sufficiently widespread and prestigious to be adopted both on Crete and on Cyprus would have been lost completely from the epigraphic record.⁷⁹ It is perhaps possible to explain the phonological peculiarities in another way, for example the Linear B /d/ series arising from what was originally a Minoan dental flap that was closer to /r/ but perceived as closer to a /d/ by Greek speakers (and also perhaps liable to be interpreted as a /t/ in other languages).⁸⁰ A different explanation for distribution of these sign values would make the hypothesis that Linear A and Cypro-Minoan could be ‘sister’ scripts much less attractive, and overall it is more economical to assume that Cypriot writing was borrowed directly from the Cretan Linear A tradition, even though certainty remains elusive.

The signs shown in [Table 1.6](#) must correspond to only a fraction of the overall sign repertoire of any form of Cypro-Minoan, given that related syllabaries always have more than 50 signs and most more than 70.⁸¹ This leaves us with a further question: where do the rest of the attested Cypro-

⁷⁷ On the validity of applying Linear B values to Linear A signs, see Steele and Meißner (2017).

⁷⁸ M. Lejeune (1958) 327.

⁷⁹ This has however been argued by Sherratt (2013), who suggests a now lost ancestor script originating from a different geographical area such as Anatolia.

⁸⁰ I am indebted to Rupert Thompson for the suggestion. Other ways of explaining these features have also been suggested; see for example Valério (2016) 198–215 and 288–99 (that Linear A may not have been entirely lacking in voiced/voiceless contrasts in the stops), or Davis (2014) 204–14 (that Linear A possessed a dental fricative).

⁸¹ We can also observe that Cypro-Minoan did not inherit the system of ideograms known in Linear A, perhaps because it was encountered outside of the bureaucratic sphere to which those ideograms were restricted.

Minoan signs come from? Perhaps some Cypro-Minoan signs are related to Linear A ones but their shapes have been so altered over time that this is difficult to confirm. Valério's research, based on close attention to palaeographic variation in both writing systems, suggests that we may be able to reconstruct more links between Linear A and Cypro-Minoan signs, leading him cautiously to posit the values of some 56 signs (although with varying degrees of confidence in different cases; discussed in more detail in [section 1.4](#) above).⁸² On the other hand, it is possible and indeed likely that the development of writing on Cyprus involved a degree of innovation, whether in terms of the overall repertoire of signs or the shapes of the signs, or both.⁸³ Whatever the process of adaptation, the end result of the adoption of literacy on Cyprus was a writing system that was characteristically Cypriot and could not be confused with similar scripts in other areas. This began a link between Cypriot writing and Cypriot identity that was to last until the abolition of the city kingdoms around the end of the 4th century BC and probably even later, as we will see in the other chapters of this book.

1.6.2 Multiple External Influences

The previous section ([1.6.1](#)) has shown that we can confidently ascribe the origin of Cypriot writing to the Aegean, with the initial adoption of writing almost certainly based directly on Linear A. But why did Cyprus borrow an Aegean writing system? At least two alternative possibilities could be envisaged. The first is that Cypriots could have borrowed cuneiform: Cyprus is located very near to the Levantine coast, tucked under the Anatolian peninsula a long way to the east of the Aegean, and so is considerably closer to the civilisations of the Near East than it is to Crete. Admittedly, some small traces of Linear A have been found as far east as Israel, and so Cypriots might have had opportunities to encounter literate Cretans nearby as well as through the mechanism of direct trade with Crete.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the choice of an Aegean script over the nearby well-developed cuneiform writing systems is a curious one, and all the more so given that Cypriots at this time were evidently aware of literate or para-literate Near Eastern traditions such as seal usage.⁸⁵

⁸² Valério (2016) esp. 301 (Table 3.126).

⁸³ Bombardieri and Jasink (2010) have suggested influence from the contemporary decorative repertoire.

⁸⁴ See Finkelberg, Uchitel and Ussishkin (1996) and Oren et al. (1996) for the finds from Lachish and Tel Haror in Israel.

⁸⁵ See Palaima (1989b).

The second possible scenario is that Cypriots could have invented their own script *ab initio*, although this may sound a less likely option given the proximity of other literate societies in possession of writing systems that could be borrowed easily. However, the *ab initio* creation of distinctive writing systems within an already literate environment is not unknown, making this at the least a plausible counterfactual suggestion. In fact, just such a development took place in nearby Anatolia in the Bronze Age with the creation of the script known as Anatolian Hieroglyphic (or ‘Hieroglyphic Luwian’ after the primary language written in it). The invention of this writing system is usually ascribed to the period of the Hittite empire, at which time a form of cuneiform (developed from Akkadian cuneiform) was used to write the Anatolian language Hittite.⁸⁶ At the same time, however, a more pictorial-looking system that we label as hieroglyphic (bearing no relation to other Mediterranean ‘hieroglyphic’ systems such as the Egyptian or Cretan) began to be used within the same context where cuneiform was being used but for different types of texts: e.g. where cuneiform was used for record-keeping on clay tablets and recorded the Hittite language, the hieroglyphic script was used for monuments on stone and came to be associated primarily with a related Anatolian language, Luwian.⁸⁷ It has been suggested that it was the bilingual setting that drove the creation of the hieroglyphic script,⁸⁸ effectively giving a visible manifestation to one local language. For this reason the impetus to write in the hieroglyphic script has been linked with the promotion of local identities.⁸⁹ That link with identity must play a significant role in the continued use of the hieroglyphic writing system after the fall of the Hittite empire and into the 1st millennium BC, when it became the tool of the Neo-Hittite states. The relationship between writing systems and identity is something to which we will return in relation to Cypriot writing shortly.

While there is little point in considering why Cypriots did not invent a new script *ab initio*, their decision to shun cuneiform, a script they were clearly to some extent aware of, deserves some explanation. Cuneiform was the principal script of several nearby civilisations, and following its initial development from tokens and primitive accounting documents, it was adapted for multiple languages to create different forms of cuneiform: there

⁸⁶ However, for a different view, seeing the script as created much earlier (the late 3rd or early 2nd millennium BC), see Waal (2012).

⁸⁷ On the range of uses of the hieroglyphic script and the possibility that it was used in wooden documents, see Waal (2011). On the Luwian language and its sociolinguistic setting, see Yakubovich (2010).

⁸⁸ Yakubovich (2008).

⁸⁹ E.g. Payne (2008). See also Payne (2015) more generally on the writing system.

are several variants including Sumerian, Babylonian, Akkadian and Hittite, all of which are predominantly syllabic systems with logographic components, as well as the later Ugaritic cuneiform consonantal alphabet. Just as we have observed for the Aegean scripts, cuneiform underwent several processes of adaptation for these different languages and different societies and administrations. The longstanding cuneiform tradition stretched back into the 3rd millennium BC, and was the tool of well-developed Near Eastern economies long before Cyprus underwent its transformation from a village-based to a town-centred, urbanised settlement pattern with its concomitant burgeoning of the economy and related social stratification. When Cyprus became ready to adopt literacy, why did it not look to these nearby literate societies for the technology of writing?

During the Late Bronze Age, there is much evidence to suggest that Cypriots knew of cuneiform, and some may have been able to write it. By about the LCII period (i.e. around the 14th century BC, after the initial Cypriot adoption of writing) we know from the Amarna Letters, as well as the Hattusha archive and later archives at Ugarit (13th century BC), that Akkadian cuneiform was sufficiently prestigious to be adopted as the script of official diplomatic correspondence between the great powers of the eastern Mediterranean: particularly Egypt, Assyria, Hatti and Ugarit, and also notably Cyprus itself. These diplomatic records include letters sent by the king of Alashiya, a toponym widely accepted to correspond to Cyprus, to the kings of other civilisations.⁹⁰ Petrographic analysis on at least one tablet from Ugarit thought to pertain to Alashiya has identified the probable provenance of the object as Cypriot, which further adds to the impression that Cyprus was playing an active part in international diplomacy via the mechanism of cuneiform letters.⁹¹ It seems quite likely that there were at least some individuals in Cyprus who were sufficiently trained in writing Akkadian in cuneiform to have written these documents, although the possible employment of trained scribes from another location cannot be ruled out completely.

At Ugarit, on the coast of northern Syria facing nearby Cyprus, cuneiform was just one of the scripts in use; in fact, Cypro-Minoan is also attested there in the 13th century BC (the 'CM3' documents, particularly the tablets ##212–15).⁹² The Alashiyan diplomatic documents from Ugarit mentioned

⁹⁰ On the Amarna letters see Moran (1992). On the Alashiya correspondence from Ugarit, see Malbran-Labat (1999).

⁹¹ See Goren et al. (2003) esp. 238–40.

⁹² On the context of Cypriot writing at Ugarit, see Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 132–45.

above also belong to the 13th century and were found in the residence of Urtenu, among an archive of around 500 tablets; two Cypro-Minoan inscriptions were found in the same residence (##210–11), clay labels preserving two and three signs respectively.⁹³ Similarly the Cypro-Minoan tablet ##212 was found in a library that also included texts in both Akkadian and Ugaritic cuneiform. The evidence strongly suggests that by this period Cypro-Minoan was coming into contact with cuneiform, and Ugarit is a location where Cypriots could have encountered cuneiform even earlier, since cuneiform is first attested at the site by at least the 15th century BC. In fact, as a cosmopolitan city where writing flourished during the Late Bronze Age, Ugarit became home to multiple writing systems (Cypro-Minoan, Egyptian hieroglyphics and multiple forms of cuneiform including an Ugaritic ‘alphabetic’ variant are attested) and multiple languages (at least Babylonian, Akkadian, Egyptian, Hittite, Canaanite, Hurrian and the language underlying the Cypro-Minoan inscriptions, as well as some late examples of Sumerian after the language had probably already died out).⁹⁴ In this milieu, whatever language Cypriots were speaking it would have been only one among many.

Although it is more difficult to find direct evidence for Cypriots encountering cuneiform in the LCI period, the proximity of the Near East and its longstanding writing traditions suggest that it would have been at least theoretically possible for Cypriots to adopt the technology from that direction. Cypriots certainly knew of the Near Eastern usage of cylinder seals, which were strongly associated with literate practices in the Near East and in Cyprus may have had similar literate associations (see [section 1.3](#) above). The fact that they were sometimes inscribed with Cypro-Minoan signs could also suggest this, and there is even one example of a reused Babylonian seal with a cuneiform inscription that was later incised with a short Cypro-Minoan text (##194). We certainly cannot argue that Cypriots were not aware of cuneiform, whether or not they were well acquainted with its wide range of uses in Near Eastern administrative systems.

Palaima has suggested that cuneiform was overlooked by Cypriots because of its large and complex repertoire of signs that made it a specialised tool of professional scribes in the Near East.⁹⁵ This is difficult to substantiate,

⁹³ A photograph of ##211, which was listed in Olivier (2007) but not analysed because at the time it remained unpublished, appears in Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 2 254 (no. 211).

⁹⁴ See Schaeffer (1939) 37–9 and (1956).

⁹⁵ Palaima (1989a) 161.

however: how complex is too complex? A counter-argument might be that cuneiform was and had already been adopted by multiple societies, and that some incarnations show much more streamlined systems (e.g. the Ugaritic consonantal alphabet and even the later Old Persian semi-syllabic system). Indeed, Cypriots seem not to have borrowed the Linear A system wholesale, but rather to have adopted the core of syllabic signs and ignored the ideographic ones (if they were aware of them at all considering that they were predominantly used in quite restricted administrative contexts⁹⁶). On the other hand, some scholars (including Palaima himself) have suggested more convincingly that the choice of an Aegean script is related rather to the creation and maintenance of a unique and distinctive Cypriot identity.⁹⁷

One striking aspect of writing in Late Bronze Age Cyprus is the apparently mixed nature of influences on writing, with a script that seems to be based directly on an Aegean model, while the objects being inscribed are sometimes inspired by Near Eastern and sometimes by Aegean types. In the earliest stages of Cypriot literacy, as far as we can tell from the surviving LCI inscriptions, there seems to be a significant debt to Aegean clay document types, while on the other hand the new fashion for cylinder seals clearly looks towards the Near East for its primary inspiration. [Chapter 3](#) will treat in more detail the range of inscribed items in use during the Late Bronze Age, where it will become evident that the mixture of Aegean and Near Eastern influences on Cypriot writing were not confined to the earliest period of literacy alone. What is striking, however, is that over time it appears that Cypriots developed their own distinct traditions, most evident in the use of clay cylinders (which are not very close in type to cylindrical and conical clay texts inscribed in cuneiform in the Near East and unparalleled in the Aegean) and especially the small, spherical clay balls that are almost completely unknown outside of Cyprus (see [Chapter 3](#), [section 3.2.3](#) on the clay balls and [section 3.2.4](#) on the range of document types in use). Cyprus was not simply a passive agent in Mediterranean literacy, and as well as the element of innovation evident in the creation of new document types, we can also observe that the appearance of Cypro-Minoan at Ugarit shows Cypriot writing having some influence outside of the island. This may also apply to two Cypriot-looking clay balls found at Ugarit that were inscribed not in Cypro-Minoan but in cuneiform.

Cypriots were certainly contributing to an epigraphic environment during the Late Bronze Age that was quite at home in a setting so close to

⁹⁶ See Steele (2017).

⁹⁷ Palaima (1989a) 162, Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 63.

the Near East and yet not far from the Aegean, and linked to both by commercial and maritime connections. The mixed influences on writing indicate what are probably conscious choices on the part of Cypriots to create their own unique written tradition, and this is particularly something that developed over time and became more obvious in the LCII and LCIII periods. Nevertheless, among the three earliest Cypro-Minoan inscriptions of LCI, this mixture is already apparent and shows the early stage of a phenomenon that was to last more than a millennium.

*... a society may change from one type to another, sometimes with great suddenness and violence. Do we then speak of a society at different points in time or do we speak of two different societies?*¹

2.1 A Period in Flux?

The spotlight in this chapter will be on a different chronological period from that of the first, moving forward to the Cypro-Geometric period (11th to 8th centuries BC), when the Cypro-Minoan writing system of the Late Bronze Age was replaced by, or rather changed into, a different one that we label the Cypriot Syllabary. As we will see, there are different ways of envisaging these changes, and from the beginning it must be emphasised that it is not only the ruptures that are important but also the continuities across the whole period and beyond. The focus will be on how we think about a transition from one writing system, or one social situation, to another.

There is a general tendency to think about the past in terms of discrete historical periods: for ancient Cyprus, for example, we might pigeonhole the Chalcolithic period, the Late Bronze Age, the Cypro-Archaic period, the Ptolemaic administration, the Roman administration, etc. Each ‘period’ has an implied coherence and is framed within well-defined chronological parameters. Each one has its own experts, and its own distinctive features. However, by retrospectively imposing boundaries on the periods, we also tend to put up some barriers between them that are not necessarily helpful. The boundary might be chosen because of a considerable difference in the social or cultural or administrative situations before and after it, for example the differences in social complexity between the Middle and Late Bronze Ages on Cyprus (as discussed in [Chapter 1](#)), or the administrative differences between the age of the city kingdoms and the following Ptolemaic appropriation of the island (touched on in [Chapter 5](#)), both of which might be classed as ‘sudden and violent’ changes as in the quotation

¹ Evans-Pritchard (1961) 55.

Table 2.1 Absolute dates assigned to the Late Bronze Age to Cypro-Archaic periods.

Period	Absolute dates
Late Bronze Age (Late Cypriot I–III)	1575–1050
Cypro-Geometric I	1050–950
Cypro-Geometric II	950–850
Cypro-Geometric III	850–750
Cypro-Archaic	750–475

from Evans-Pritchard above. However, there will always be some continuities across the boundary.² The stability of certain socio-cultural phenomena across periods of transition are just as important as the changes when we try to understand what was happening and how it happened.

This chapter deals with the transition from the end of the Cypriot Late Bronze Age in the 11th century BC to the Iron Age (i.e. across the Cypro-Geometric period and into the Cypro-Archaic period in the 8th century BC). Table 2.1 gives the traditional chronological ranges of these periods.³

The main period under consideration here is the Cypro-Geometric (c.1050–750 BC), which is marked by a sparse epigraphic record, and lies between two other periods in which writing is better attested. Thus we have better evidence for language use and literacy before and after the Cypro-Geometric period than we do during the period itself. Nevertheless, the few Cypro-Geometric inscriptions that have survived are some of the most important texts for our understanding of the development of language and script on the island: they include the earliest Cypriot texts in Greek (the *Opheltau* inscription, the earliest of all surviving Greek texts after the Mycenaean Linear B documents of the Late Bronze Age) and in Phoenician, as well as, at the very end of the period, the first certain examples of the new script (the Cypriot Syllabary) that was to remain in use for a major part of the 1st millennium BC. The arrival and/or visibility of new languages and the creation of a new script further the impression of this period as one in flux, moving away from the previous linguistic and epigraphic situation of

² E.g. in the case of the transition from the city kingdoms to Ptolemaic Cyprus, it is important to consider the continuity of religious and artistic practices; see Papantoniou (2012), (2013a).
³ The table follows the traditional dating of Schaeffer (1948) 403, as revised by Dikaios (1969–71). See also Gjerstad (1948) on the Cypro-Geometric sub-divisions, and Coldstream (1999) on the tentative suggestion of a recategorisation of the absolute dates as CGI (1050–950), CGII (950–900), CGIII (900–750). Our understanding of the chronological sequence in Cyprus across these periods is also affected considerably by studies of nearby regions such as Greece and the Levant: see Gilboa and Sharon (2003).

the Late Bronze Age and towards a new situation that was to take hold and last throughout the age of the Cypriot city kingdoms. However, while we might feel more confident in our understanding of the situations before and after the Cypro-Geometric period, an investigation into the period itself has a lot to tell us about the long-term developments in Cyprus. What was the social structure of the Cypro-Geometric period like? What languages were being spoken? Who was making use of the technology of writing? What were they writing and why?

We can begin by placing the Geometric period on Cyprus in context, through a consideration of what we know about language and script before and after it, before looking in detail at the Cypro-Geometric period itself. Writing first arrived on Cyprus probably in the first phase of the Late Bronze Age (LCI: see [Chapter 1](#)), but from surviving inscriptions it seems that it was during the last part of LCII and the first part of LCIII that the technology flourished: about 70% of datable extant texts date to this period, which corresponds to the beginning of the 13th century to the mid-12th century BC (see [Chapter 3, section 3.2](#)).⁴ Few texts are dated with certainty to LCIIIB or later, and only a handful to the period immediately following the Bronze Age, i.e. the Cypro-Geometric period (specifically CGI–II). The Late Bronze Age inscriptions are all classified epigraphically as Cypro-Minoan, as often are some of the Cypro-Geometric inscriptions (although this is a question to which we will return later in the chapter). Owing to their diverse and often short/fragmentary nature, epigraphic coherence cannot be demonstrated for the whole Cypro-Minoan corpus,⁵ and it furthermore appears that three tablets from Enkomi, dated probably to LCIIIA–B (late 13th to mid-11th century BC) and sometimes referred to as ‘CM2’, may be written in a slightly different but related script with a different repertoire of signs.⁶

While Cypro-Minoan remains undeciphered, the languages of the Late Bronze Age cannot be studied in detail, beyond some extremely limited observations on patterns in sign groups (see [Chapter 3, section 3.2.1](#)).⁷ It is quite likely that the island was already linguistically diverse by this stage (see [Chapter 4, section 4.2.1](#)), a scenario that seems all the more probable considering the attractive position of Cyprus with its natural resources that were being exploited extensively during this period. However, it is only during the Cypro-Geometric period itself that we have the first deciphered Cypriot inscriptions, some in Greek and some in Phoenician, while

⁴ See also Steele (2013) 16–17, Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 64–132.

⁵ Steele (2012).

⁶ Steele (2014a). This problem is revisited in Chapter 3.

⁷ See also Steele (2013) 60–80.

inscriptions in one or more unidentified languages (on which see [Chapter 3](#)) continue to appear into the mid-1st millennium BC.

In Cyprus the epigraphic record of the 11th to 8th centuries is very sparse, and indeed there are no syllabic inscriptions at all that are dated with certainty to the 9th century. Although from what has survived there appears to be a gap in the practice of syllabic writing, we know that the gap in the epigraphic record cannot correspond to a real gap in literacy because the script in use in the 8th century and later, commonly known as the Cypriot (or Cypro-Greek) Syllabary, is closely related to Cypro-Minoan. The formal similarities between the two writing systems, including a number of shared sign shapes and probably also values, can only be explained if the practice of writing continued unbroken across the period from which few records survive. The ‘gap’ is ours, a gap in surviving epigraphy, not in literacy or epigraphic habit during the early 1st millennium BC.⁸ Nevertheless, it is an unfortunate gap because it occurs at about the time when the new Cypriot Syllabic script must have been created and so is a potential hindrance to the study of any reform of the script and the uses of writing when such a reform took place.

The earliest texts that can be identified with certainty as being written in the new Cypriot Syllabic script date from the 8th century BC; we will look at the new script and how we can recognise it later in the chapter. Some of these texts are written in Greek and demonstrate that the association between the Cypriot Greek dialect and the Cypriot Syllabic script must have begun in the earliest phase of this new script. The association between the two was to last for hundreds of years until the Syllabary eventually gave way to the Greek alphabet around the 3rd century BC (see [Chapter 5, section 5.3](#)). It has sometimes been assumed that the new writing system was originally created specifically for writing Greek.⁹ However, non-Greek inscriptions written in the same script are already present in the 8th century, and so it is unlikely that the script was ever viewed as exclusively a tool for writing Greek. These non-Greek languages are a pervasive element in the Cypriot epigraphic record throughout the 1st millennium BC (see [Chapter 3, section 3.3](#)), although their significance has often been underestimated in linguistic and historical treatments of the island.¹⁰ From a linguistic point of view, a third element also enters the picture at the time

⁸ Egetmeyer (2013) 107–8, Steele (2011b), Sherratt (2003). For another study of the epigraphic material surviving from the Cypro-Geometric period, taking a slightly different approach from the one in this chapter, see Egetmeyer (2017).

⁹ E.g. Egetmeyer (2013) 108.

¹⁰ Egetmeyer (2010b), (2013) 109; Steele (2011a), (2013) 99–104.

of the ‘epigraphic gap’ as Phoenician inscriptions begin to appear in the epigraphic record from the 9th century BC onwards. It is not until the 7th and 6th centuries BC and later that larger numbers of inscriptions in any of these languages begin to be attested, making it easier to study the distribution of epigraphy at a slightly later time when Greek, one or two non-Greek (but still formally unidentified) languages and Phoenician dominate the island’s written record (considered in more detail in [Chapter 4](#)).

It is easy to see why the Cypro-Geometric period, lasting from the mid-11th to the mid-8th century BC, is generally branded as a transition from one situation to another. New languages appear, marking a significant and lasting shift in the island’s linguistic landscape. A new script is created (the Cypriot Syllabary), and another one is imported to Cyprus, presumably along with speakers of the language written in it (Phoenician). Although there are some links and continuities, there must also have been considerable social changes as the island’s regions developed the political configuration that was to be established formally in the city kingdoms well attested in the Iron Age. Those city kingdoms were eventually to adopt, variously, writing in the new Cypriot Syllabary or the newly arrived Phoenician alphabet as an administrative instrument that was exploited in local rule.¹¹ However, the impression of a transitive period between one social, linguistic and epigraphic situation and another is not a reason to ignore the Cypro-Geometric period and concentrate on the ones before and after it. Indeed, trying to elucidate the transitional period can only enhance our understanding of those that bracket it as we see the eventual fate of one tradition and the emergence of another. The aim of this chapter is specifically to examine what we know about the place that writing occupied in Cypro-Geometric society.

2.2 Society in the Cypro-Geometric Period

While the Cypriot Late Bronze Age and Cypro-Archaic periods are relatively well understood from an archaeological perspective, the Cypro-Geometric is less well attested. One important factor underlying this imbalance is the fact that very little has been excavated in terms of architectural or domestic remains from the period, which is related in part to the fact that Cypro-Geometric settlements have often been built over repeatedly, sometimes right up to the present day. This in itself is evidence of continuity of occupation, in the case of some sites for thousands of years, but has an unfortunate consequence in obscuring the early occupation levels of such

¹¹ Iacovou (2013a).

sites.¹² The remains of Cypro-Geometric Kition, for example, are obscured not only by subsequent Classical, Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine settlement on the same site, but also by the urban mass of the modern city of Larnaca, meaning that chances for excavation are limited to occasions when redevelopment gives access to underlying layers. Often our best evidence for the population of Geometric Cyprus comes from the mortuary record, specifically from tombs found in cemetery sites that were situated outside of areas of settlement – although caution is necessary when using the mortuary record as evidence because it is unlikely that all social groups employed the same burial practices, and consequently it is difficult to estimate what proportion of the population is represented by surviving remains in cemeteries. The continued use of particular sanctuary sites provides some further information for cultural practices. In recent years, a resurgence of interest in the Early Iron Age has also led to some further excavation and to renewed analysis of already existing material.

The later part of the Late Bronze Age on Cyprus saw the island responding to wider economic crises that affected the whole eastern Mediterranean at about the end of the 13th century and beginning of the 12th century BC, bringing about major social changes in different regions as well as damaging international trading networks. The 12th century itself has famously been branded ‘The Crisis Years’.¹³ The causes and early progression of these widespread ‘crises’ are difficult to account for, and the period has often been more or less romanticised as one of marauding pirates (the ‘Sea Peoples’) and displaced populations.¹⁴ One notable effect was the destruction of the palaces of the Mycenaean administrations in Greece, sometimes with considerable depopulation of areas that were once under their control. At this time Cyprus (in the LCIIIC–LCIIIA transition), although it does not seem to have undergone a complete social or economic breakdown, witnessed some destructions and abandonments of urban sites, even ones that were relatively recently established.¹⁵ However, it is in the following 11th century BC that significant changes on the island affected its landscape drastically, creating what seems to be a radically new social situation that was to endure through the Early Iron Age and beyond. The new social

¹² Iacovou (2008b) 248.

¹³ Ward and Joukowsky (1992).

¹⁴ Cline (2014) is recommended for an interlinked account of the wider effects of this period around the Mediterranean. Another recent treatment of migration resulting from the crises is Yasur-Landau (2010). Specific links with ‘piratical’ behaviour have been considered by Hitchcock and Maier (2014), (2018).

¹⁵ See South (1989) and Iacovou (1994). On the varied responses to the ‘Crisis Years’ seen across Cyprus at this time, see most recently Georgiou (2015).

landscape of the 11th century BC, with innovations for example in the mortuary record and in iconography and settlement patterns, has very often been linked with immigrant populations that are presumed to have come from the Aegean, bringing with them the Greek language and beginning the process of ‘hellenisation’ on the island.¹⁶

The Cypro-Geometric period is conceived of as beginning in the mid-11th century BC, c.1050, and the transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age therefore falls at exactly the time when the island underwent these significant social changes. Rather than looking towards the external influences that may have impacted on the island at this time, this chapter is going to focus again on the internal aspect and on the positive conclusions that we may draw concerning the people who lived in Cyprus during the Cypro-Geometric period, and how and why they were writing and what they may have been speaking. The whole island seems to have been impacted by the changes that took place before and at this time, but some regional differences apparent in the archaeological record must not be overlooked, because regional diversity also seems to have some effect on the practice of writing, which is attested in this period only in particular locations.

The large or ‘urban’ settlements occupied in the 11th century and through the Cypro-Geometric period are almost exclusively found on the coast. The primary exception to this rule is Idalion, which is situated quite far inland but undoubtedly was able to continue as an important settlement because of its proximity to the Troodos mountains and hence to the copper mines that provided a major source of wealth.¹⁷ Some of the sites active in this period continue pre-existing settlements, for example Idalion and Kourion (although often with some movement within the space occupied by the settlement),¹⁸ while others are new foundations, for example Amathus.¹⁹ In the east of the island, the newer settlements of Salamis and Kition seem to

¹⁶ The evidence underpinning the assumptions concerning an Aegean migration to Cyprus has been surveyed and analysed by Maria Iacovou in a number of publications, e.g. Iacovou (1994), (1997), (1999), (2008a) esp. 237–43, (2008b). The suddenness of such a migration episode has been questioned by proponents of the ‘hybridisation’ of Aegean influences in Cypriot culture over a longer period of time: see the account of Voskos and Knapp (2008). For a different view of the process by which the Greek language took hold in Cyprus, see Steele (2016b).

¹⁷ See Hadjicosti (1999).

¹⁸ See Buitron-Oliver (1997), (1999).

¹⁹ Amathus is usually assumed to have been founded in the 11th century: see Iacovou (2002a). Petit has more recently argued that the foundation of the city as a political entity (or *polis*) should be ascribed to the CGIII period, despite the presence of earlier material in local tombs: Petit (2015), and see also Alpe, Petit and Velho (2007) on evidence for a palace building in the 9th century and the suggestion that this relates to the emergence of Amathus as a city state. On the problems of identifying the activities of Cypriot city states or *poleis* through archaeological remains, see further Iacovou (2014a).

have grown up in explicit connection with gaining access to the sea, the former a new foundation replacing the once substantial nearby city of Enkomi that was a dominant polity during the Late Bronze Age, and the latter growing in importance as it took over as a principal trading location from nearby Hala Sultan Tekke, whose harbour had silted up and become unusable for the long-distance trade with which it had previously been associated.²⁰ However, even though we know of the existence of these Early Iron Age settlements, it is usually the case that we know little about the exact extent of the inhabited areas and the organisation of their buildings.

An island-wide trend in the mortuary record that begins in the mid-11th century aids us considerably in an attempt to reconstruct Cypro-Geometric society: there is a marked shift from intramural to extramural burials. This is to say that previously it had been most common for the dead to be buried within the confines of the area where the local population was living, but in the 11th century there begin to appear cemeteries located well away from residential sectors. These necropoleis, featuring unprecedented uniformity in burial type in the prevalent use of the chamber tomb with a long dromos, were dedicated purely to mortuary practice, and mark a new distinction in the Cypriot record between areas associated with the living and areas associated with the dead. This is not to say that intramural burial was not still practised by some Cypriots at the same time, but for the reasons outlined above we have less evidence for such practices in this period. The new appearance of extramural cemeteries probably indicates an ideological shift, which may also suggest a break from previous burial practices and even perhaps from previous social and/or familial structures. This is one of the reasons why the 11th century has so often been seen as the period in which an immigrant population takes hold on the island. As Iacovou has put it: 'If the establishment of the Early Iron Age settlements had been achieved by the indigenous people in the absence of a culturally distinct human element, might we not expect the Cypriotes to have continued to construct their traditional mortuary chambers?'²¹

A common approach to the problem of social change in 11th-century Cyprus has been for a long time to look for evidence of Aegean influences, based on an assumption that it was the migration of Greek speakers to the island that motivated the changes.²² More recently, however, scholars have turned from the evidence for ruptures in the material record to the evidence

²⁰ See Yon (1999b).

²¹ Iacovou (2008b) 242.

²² Iacovou (2008a) presents the evidence for Aegean influences comprehensively.

of continuities. The remarkable continuity of religious practices from the Late Bronze Age through to the Classical period, in both location type (open air sanctuaries) and offering type (e.g. the pervasive clay figurines), has for example been emphasised as indicative of continuing distinctively Cypriot cultural traits that defy any social and political reconfigurations.²³ Further continuities in writing, despite the eventual change of script from Cypro-Minoan to the Cypriot Syllabary, will become obvious when we turn to the epigraphic record. While influence from the Aegean is very likely to have been accompanied by the migration of some individuals and groups, it is also important to remember that there must have been a local element in the incorporation of new ideas and customs. There is almost certainly a parallel to be found in the arrival of the Greek language, since language shifts are typologically likely to involve not only the movement of some speakers (if they involve movement at all) but also more significantly new attitudes towards language use in the place where the change takes place: in trying to reconstruct the processes via which Greek became a dominant language on Cyprus, we have to factor in the adoption of the language by locals who were originally speakers of one or more different languages.²⁴

Changing scholarly attitudes towards one particular tomb from the end of the Late Bronze Age will serve as a salutary lesson about the difference between evidence and interpretation. The shaft grave known as Tomb 40 at Kaloriziki near Kourion is the richest and perhaps most famous tomb dating to the LCIIIB period, the last phase of the Bronze Age corresponding to the early to mid-11th century BC. From its discovery (following the confiscation of items looted by tomb robbers) and first publication, it has been hailed as the tomb of an Achaean warrior prince settled in Cyprus, with a wealthy array of grave goods including most famously an elaborate sceptre of gold and enamel.²⁵ The tomb (which also contained a cremation) has been incorporated into discussions of the spread of 'heroic' burials, via comparisons with the Homeric canon.²⁶ However, on closer inspection there is more to the Kaloriziki Tomb 40 grave assemblage than pure Aegean influence. Firstly, concepts of 'warrior identity' were not necessarily differentiated strongly across the Mediterranean at this time, and an argument can be made for a convergence of warrior-related ideologies into a quite homogeneous supra-regional 'template' that was communicated through trade and diplomatic

²³ Snodgrass (1994) 171–3.

²⁴ Steele (2016b).

²⁵ McFadden (1954).

²⁶ E.g. Karageorghis (2003b).

networks.²⁷ The sceptre from Tomb 40 has been argued to show specifically Egyptian influence in its iconography, with two birds sitting on top of a golden sun-like ball.²⁸ Moreover, the whole assemblage along with the burial type can even be considered ‘as much local as they are Aegean’, going by other local parallels.²⁹ The tomb contains not only grave goods associated with a male burial, but also some associated with a female. The interred woman has been suggested recently to be the Cypriot wife of an Achaean prince,³⁰ pulling together the threads of the external and local and envisaging it quite literally as a marriage of different influences. Such interpretations reflect well the ways in which scholarship has been affected by changing trends, one could say from the colonial to the post-colonial and beyond.

The tomb discussed above is quite an extreme example of the problems that can arise from different interpretations of the same material, especially when they are found in a burial and so isolated from the situation in which the buried individuals would have been living. Nevertheless, excavated mortuary remains can be of great help in an attempt to reconstruct Cypriot society in the 11th to 8th centuries BC. For example, recent studies suggest that tombs and burial assemblages can provide important information about life and identity in this period, both locally and across the island.³¹ It has also long been recognised that we can reach some consensus on the wealth of individuals buried, although this may also highlight a problem that often the best-preserved tombs seem to pertain to relatively wealthy individuals, and we must be missing the evidence for poorer Cypriots of this period (a problem, however, not uncommon for the material record).³² The few written documents that have survived from this period sometimes appear to be linked with wealthier individuals, in particular the inscriptions found in tombs in the Palaepaphos-Skales Cyprio-Geometric cemetery (see below), but others have no obvious connection with wealth or status.

Moving from individuals to broader social patterns, another area in which some productive insights can be made is the wider political geography of the island between the end of the Bronze Age and the first surviving references to the city kingdoms in the Archaic period. It is not until the late 8th and early 7th century BC that we have positive evidence of the city kingdoms

²⁷ See Crielaard (1998) and Whitley (2002). I would also like to thank Philip Boyes for allowing me to read an article in progress on the same topic (with particular reference to reflexes of ‘warrior identity’ in Phoenicia).

²⁸ Korou (1994).

²⁹ Buitron-Oliver (1999) 70.

³⁰ Matthäus and Schumacher-Matthäus (2013) 168.

³¹ E.g. Diakou (2013), Janes (2008).

³² E.g. Coldstream (1989).

originating from the incorporation of Cyprus into the Assyrian empire. The Assyrian kings Esarhaddon and Sargon II listed ten and seven Cypriot kingdoms respectively in royal inscriptions dated to the first half of the 7th century, most of which have secure correspondences with known kingdoms of the later Archaic to Classical periods, thus allowing us to draw up a map of the Cypriot political configuration of the early Archaic period.³³ It is also in the 7th century that we have the first surviving Cypriot Syllabic royal inscriptions, found in Kourion but originating from Paphos and recording its king, Eteandros.³⁴ However, we have considerable evidence that points towards a similar political configuration pre-dating these direct references by hundreds of years, with independent polities, many almost certainly the same ones that continue through the 1st millennium, distributed across the island. An inscription from the temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu dating to the early 12th century BC (i.e. still in the Late Bronze Age) already appears to record the names of some Cypriot centres including Salamis and Kition, and probably suggests decentralised power structures in different regions of Cyprus even at this early date.³⁵ An Egyptian papyrus text of probably the 11th century BC, the Report of Wenamun, makes reference to a Cypriot queen whose favour the Egyptian official Wenamun gains during his stay on the island, although it is not clear how we should relate this reference to a queen to the broader reconstruction of the Cypriot political landscape.³⁶ Even more persuasive is the distribution of major centres as attested in the archaeological record, with the sites of all of the later known kingdoms originating in or before the 11th century BC.³⁷ The language shifts that took place at these sites, to Greek in most areas but also to Phoenician in some, did not apparently affect their considerable longevity. It will again become obvious when we consider the epigraphic record of the 11th to 8th centuries that not only likely power structures but also the practice of writing showed considerable continuity from the Late Bronze Age through to the Archaic period, again despite the arrival of new languages.

2.3 The Cypro-Geometric Epigraphic Record

Fewer than 20 surviving Cypriot inscriptions can be dated with any degree of certainty to the Cypro-Geometric period (c.1050–750 BC). Most of these

³³ E.g. Rupp (1987) 166.

³⁴ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Kourion 1. See Iacovou (2013a) 140.

³⁵ Snodgrass (1994) 169–70.

³⁶ See Goedicke (1975) on the Report of Wenamun.

³⁷ Iacovou (1994), (2002b).

are scattered across different geographical locations, occasionally outside of Cyprus as well as within. At Palaepaphos in the south-west of the island, however, a significant group of seven inscriptions associated with Cypro-Geometric tombs presents a unique opportunity to observe the context of literacy at a single location at this time. Palaepaphos is therefore treated first, followed by the epigraphic material from other sites.

2.3.1 Cypro-Geometric Inscriptions from Palaepaphos

The epigraphic ensemble from Cypro-Geometric tombs at Palaepaphos-Skales created something of a scholarly frenzy when it was first published in 1983.³⁸ One of the inscriptions, incised into a bronze obelos and consisting of only five signs, could be read as a Greek name: *o-pe-le-ta-u*, *Op^heltau* (Cypriot dialectal genitive: ‘of Opheltās’) (Figure 2.1). The obelos was found in a tomb dated securely to CGI, the first phase of the Cypro-Geometric period (c.1050–950 BC). With the exception of the records of the Mycenaean Greek administrations (c.1450–1200 BC), this inscription was now the earliest attested text in the Greek language found anywhere in the Mediterranean. It is also the earliest Greek text found in Cyprus by perhaps 200 years or more.

Twenty-five years after its publication, the *Op^heltau* obelos continued to attract controversy as a debate opened up concerning the script in which the text is written. The original editors, Émilie and Olivier Masson, had been convinced that the inscription was the earliest surviving text written in the newly created Cypriot Syllabary.³⁹ In 2008, however, Olivier published



Figure 2.1 The *Opheltau* obelos.

³⁸ É. and O. Masson (1983).

³⁹ É. and O. Masson (1983).

an argument that this is a text not in the new Cypriot Syllabary (since it has no innovating Cypriot Syllabic features) but in Cypro-Minoan, the earlier writing system from which the Cypriot Syllabary was adapted.⁴⁰ While the Cypriot Syllabary is deciphered (and many of its texts can be read as Greek), Cypro-Minoan is considered undeciphered. However, it was argued not that the reading of the inscription is invalid, only that the original assumptions made about its epigraphic classification were mistaken. Although Olivier's proposition has been accepted by many scholars,⁴¹ the debate continues and not all are convinced.⁴²

It makes little sense to try to classify a unique text like the *Op^heltau* inscription in terms of earlier or later epigraphic corpora without first establishing what script(s) was/were in use at the time it was written and how the text compares with contemporary parallels. Attempts to categorise this inscription as either Cypro-Minoan or Cypriot Syllabic have been privileged over attempts to understand it as an inscribed object in its own epigraphic and cultural context. Putting the cart before the horse in this way only furthers distinctions that may be false or anachronistic, and it is important to redress this balance by considering the inscribed object first and its epigraphic classification later.⁴³ In fact, the body of inscribed material from the Cypro-Geometric period, if it is analysed in its own right as a separate epigraphic corpus, has the potential to make us think differently about some of the epigraphic distinctions that are often applied to Cypriot inscriptions.

The *Op^heltau* text is inscribed on a bronze obelos, a long narrow shaft of metal, square in cross-section, with a socket at one end into which a piece of wood would have been fitted. Obeloi could be made of bronze or iron, and are attested on Cyprus from the beginning of the Cypro-Geometric period through to the late Cypro-Archaic period (c.1050–475 BC). Most of the surviving Cypriot examples are made of iron, but three (uninscribed) bronze examples were found in a CG1A tomb at Salamis (c.1050),⁴⁴ and the *Op^heltau* obelos is one of three inscribed bronze examples found in a single CGI tomb at Palaepaphos (Tomb 49 of the Skales cemetery, c.1050–950).⁴⁵ From the overall assemblages of these tombs at Salamis and Palaepaphos, it appears that the obeloi were prestige goods, probably with considerable

⁴⁰ Olivier (2008) 608 (briefly). Discussed further in Olivier (2013) 16–19.

⁴¹ E.g. Egetmeyer (2013) 108–22.

⁴² E.g. Duhoux (2012).

⁴³ Steele (2012) 544.

⁴⁴ Myres (1910).

⁴⁵ Karageorghis (1983) 61.



Figure 2.2 Second obelos from Palaepaphos Tomb 49 (##171).

value, that were seen as fitting complements to a high-status burial and may even be associated with warrior-related ideology (cf. the discussion of Kaloriziki Tomb 40 in the [previous section](#)).⁴⁶ The inscriptions added to the three Palaepaphos obeloi, at least one consisting of an individual's name (perhaps the name of the deceased), have been suggested to confirm the impression of the objects as prestige items.⁴⁷

The inscriptions on the other two obeloi from Palaepaphos-Skales Tomb 49 cannot be read in the same way that the *Op^heltau* obelos can be read, but they bear signs recognisable as belonging to the long-term tradition of syllabic writing in Cyprus. One has an inscription that probably consists of two signs (in fact, two examples of the same sign) separated by a divider ([Figure 2.2](#)).

The third obelos has two inscribed single signs incised on different sides of the shaft (one side depicted in [Figure 2.3](#)). This does not appear to be a continuous inscription, and raises the question of whether the signs could be abbreviations, or perhaps even decorative marks or 'pseudo-writing' (i.e. the use of signs from writing systems, or something that looks like them, as decorative imitations of writing).

According to the site Custodian, the three inscribed obeloi were found together, leaning upright against the wall of the dromos near the entrance to the tomb. The excavation team led by Vassos Karageorghis did not have the opportunity to observe or record the exact placing of the objects in the tomb's assemblage, which is why only approximate descriptions of their locations can be given ([Figure 2.4](#)).⁴⁸

Tomb 49, in which the inscribed obeloi were found, is a chamber tomb with an elliptical chamber and short dromos. The tomb type is well attested on Cyprus from the Late Bronze Age onwards,⁴⁹ and the Palaepaphos tombs of the Skales cemetery show similarities with other sites on the island.⁵⁰ It

⁴⁶ Haarer (2000) 12–15, Coldstream (1989) 331, Rupp (1989) 335.

⁴⁷ Karageorghis (1983) 75.

⁴⁸ Karageorghis (1983) 60.

⁴⁹ See Wright (1992) 333–54.

⁵⁰ Karageorghis (1983) 3–6.



Figure 2.3 Third obelos from Palaepaphos Tomb 49 (##172).

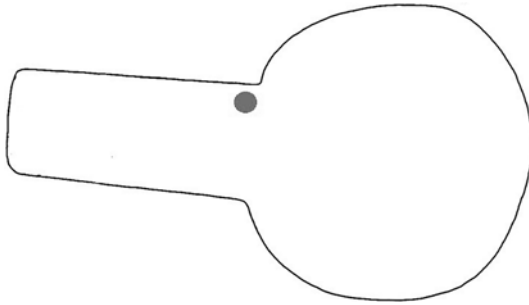


Figure 2.4 Tomb 49 at Palaepaphos-Skales, showing the approximate location of the obeloi.

was common practice to block the entrance to the tomb with rubble to prevent anyone from entering it, which may be one reason why so many of the Palaepaphos tombs had not been looted and so were able to provide the excavators with detailed information about their assemblages. Tomb 49 is no exception, and among the rubble blocking the stomion a fourth inscription was found (Figure 2.5). The inscription is deeply incised on an irregularly shaped block of calcarenite, and consists of two signs separated by a divider. The same pattern of ‘sign-divider-sign’ (sometimes referred to



Figure 2.5 Inscribed stone block from Palaepaphos Tomb 49 (##189).

as a ‘1+1’ pattern) could also be observed on one of the inscribed obeloi (Figure 2.2). It is impossible to tell whether the placing of the block among the stomion rubble was relevant to its inscription, or whether it might have been a discarded inscription simply used as filling. Another stone block with some incisions that may once have been parts of written signs was also found among the rubble.⁵¹

Finally we can add that a ceramic jar of imported ‘Canaanite’ type was found in Tomb 49 with incised potmarks (i.e. single-sign marks that cannot be read as whole texts) on its handles. Potmarking was a well-established practice that has been particularly associated with Cyprus in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, but its relationship with writing is uncertain. The marks vary, with some appearing very close to known Cypro-Minoan signs, while others do not have any close parallel among known written signs. In this instance, both marks are simple geometric shapes, with one a good parallel for Cypro-Minoan sign 006 , while the other does not look like any known Cypro-Minoan sign: it is similar to the other mark but with long flanking vertical lines on both sides. Some potmarks may perhaps have been used to convey information (e.g. by using common abbreviations), but it is possible that potmarking was largely an illiterate practice bearing only a distant relation to writing as known from longer inscriptions.⁵² The potmarks on the jug from Tomb 49 are therefore not counted here as certain examples of inscriptions, although their presence in a tomb with such a rich epigraphic repertoire is noteworthy. The marks themselves, however, are better understood as relating to the movement and trading of the vessel rather than being closely associated with the other epigraphic activity attested in this tomb.⁵³ Three other Canaanite amphorae without incised marks were also found in the tomb, as well as other imported vessels such as Bichrome I ware jugs.

⁵¹ Karageorghis (1983) 73 (49.B).

⁵² On Cypriot potmarks see Hirschfeld (1992), (2008).

⁵³ On the movement of Canaanite amphorae in eastern Mediterranean trade, see recently Pedrazzi (2016) and Martin (2016).

Placed in its close epigraphic context, we can see that the *Opheltau* obelos is not an isolated inscription but one of four texts found in the same tomb, and it is important to consider the whole epigraphic ensemble within its archaeological context. Tomb 49 contained two burials that were reasonably complete and could be sexed as males, plus some remains from a third individual. It was common practice to reuse a chamber tomb for multiple burials (presumably within the same familial group), and so it is likely that the bodies in this tomb were not all deposited at the same time. Reuses of the tomb after the first inhumation would have involved unblocking and then reblocking the stomion with rubble, which means that we cannot be certain whether the inscribed block found among the blocking material for Tomb 49 (Figure 2.5) was used for the first inhumation or only introduced for one of the subsequent ones. Although the three obeloi were found together leaning against the wall of the dromos near the chamber entrance, it does not necessarily follow that they were deposited all at once as a group.⁵⁴ We may furthermore add that the obeloi are of slightly different lengths, another indication that they may not have been manufactured or inscribed together, raising the possibility that they may have been associated with different buried individuals. The tomb's assemblage included a variety of metal vases and other items (mostly bronze but including a silver fibula and an iron knife), and a large number of pottery vessels including 14 examples of imported wares, and was categorised by Coldstream as falling into his 'Outstandingly Rich' category.⁵⁵ The items are dated to CGI (c.1050–950 BC), indicating that the tomb could have been in use for up to a century. One possibility could be that each of the three obeloi was deposited with each of the three individuals of whom remains have been found, each perhaps as much as a generation apart. However, it is also possible that the three inhumations occurred much closer together (e.g. family members of the same generation or only two generations rather than three).

Although we cannot be certain that all the epigraphic material from Tomb 49 originates from the same individual, it is nevertheless a unified corpus with a limited chronological span and almost certainly a very restricted social context, probably pertaining to a familial or otherwise close social group living in the Paphos area in the early Cypro-Geometric period. For this reason, we might expect the four inscriptions also to show epigraphic and even linguistic coherence. As we will see in more detail when we look more closely at the epigraphic classification of the inscriptions, however, the epigraphic coherence of the small corpus of material from this

⁵⁴ Haarer (2000) 13.

⁵⁵ Coldstream (1989) 331. On the assemblage, see Karageorghis (1983) 59–76.

tomb has frequently (if often indirectly) been called into question: see [section 2.4](#) below.

We can also look outside of Tomb 49 for clues about the epigraphic environment in which its inscriptions were written. None of the other excavated Cypro-Geometric tombs of the Palaepaphos-Skales cemetery has produced such an impressive array of writing, but some isolated inscriptions have been found. Another inscribed stone block was found among the rubble blocking the stomion of Tomb 67 ([Figure 2.6](#)), and bears a close resemblance to the one found in the stomion of Tomb 49. Its signs are incised less deeply than the block from Tomb 49, but it preserves the same ‘1+1’ pattern of ‘sign-divider-sign’. Tomb 67 is dated to CGI-II (c.1050–850), with at least two burials and an assemblage of which some objects can be dated to CGI (c.1050–950) and others to CGII (c.950–850). The stone block must have been used at the time of the final burial when the stomion was reblocked, but it does not necessarily follow that it was created at this time as it could have been reused from rubble used to block the stomion at an earlier inhumation.

Two inscribed bronze bowls have also been found at the Palaepaphos-Skales cemetery. The first was a recent discovery, when X-ray photography on a bowl from Tomb 235 revealed the presence of Cypro-Minoan signs that were not easily visible with the naked eye ([Figure 2.7a](#)). The tomb is dated to the Cypro-Geometric I period (c.1050–950), making it contemporary with Tomb 49. In this case the inscription is a particularly significant one, since the first five signs comprise a word that has been found in other Cypro-Minoan inscriptions on bronze bowls. Egetmeyer has argued that the five-sign sequence represents a personal name based on its ending in sign -023 and on typological parallels (some inscribed in Ugaritic cuneiform⁵⁶), and further that all three inscriptions may even refer to the same individual.⁵⁷ However, it is problematic that the other two bowls bearing the same sequence are dated earlier and probably both originate

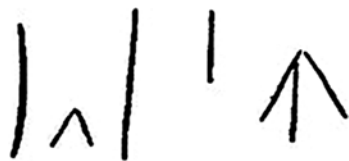


Figure 2.6 Inscribed stone block from Palaepaphos Tomb 67 (##190).

⁵⁶ See Buchholz and Matthäus (2003) 126–31.

⁵⁷ Egetmeyer (2016) 134–5.

from the other side of the island: one is of uncertain provenance but may be from a tomb at Enkomi and is suggested to date to LCIIC–LCIIIA (i.e. 13th or 12th century BC; ##179), while the other is ascribed to Enkomi but from an unknown find context and has been dated to LCIII (i.e. 12th or first half of the 11th century BC; ##183).⁵⁸ If the three inscriptions refer to the same individual, then it would follow that the Palaepaphos inscription, being dated latest by context, would have to be an earlier object (an heirloom?) that was kept for at least 200 years before being buried in Tomb 49. While perhaps not impossible, a more economical explanation would be that we are dealing with two or three individuals with the same name. Another possibility is that the five-sign sequence shared by these three bronze bowls does not represent a name at all, but some other word and perhaps one linked to the manufacture of the objects (e.g. place of manufacture or reference to the quality of bronze used⁵⁹).

A second inscribed bronze bowl was also found at the Palaepaphos-Skales cemetery, but as a surface find rather than coming from a tomb assemblage. For this reason its dating is uncertain and it is impossible to know how closely it was linked to the mortuary activity at the site. As also in the previous example, the inscription on the bowl runs around part of its rim (Figure 2.7b), which is typical of other metal vessels inscribed in Cypro-Minoan (cf. ##178–83). However, the practice is also attested in the 1st millennium BC in the Cypriot Syllabic script (see further section 2.5 below), and so the inscription type alone cannot be used to date the object.⁶⁰ From an epigraphic point of view it could be argued that its signs look more Cypro-Minoan than Cypriot Syllabic, but caution must be exercised here, as when attempting to assess the *Opheltau* inscription is this way: such an



Figure 2.7 (a) Inscribed bronze bowl from Palaepaphos-Skales Tomb 235 (##254).
(b) Inscribed bronze bowl from Palaepaphos-Skales (##186).

⁵⁸ See Ferrara 2012/13 vol. 2 on both objects for further references.

⁵⁹ The ‘branding’ of copper ingots, possibly related to assuring metal quality, may be a parallel for the latter: see Ferrara and Bell (2016).

⁶⁰ On Cypriot bronze bowls across the Geometric to Archaic periods, see Buchholz and Matthäus (2003).

epigraphic evaluation only becomes possible if we have sufficient coherent evidence of each relevant writing system to assess an inscription's date by epigraphic features. It is possible, and perhaps even likely, that the bowl is of similar date to the tombs, but this cannot be proven beyond doubt.

Tomb 71, which is dated to CGIII–CA1 (i.e. the end of the Cypro-Geometric period or perhaps the beginning of the Cypro-Archaic period, c.850–700), has produced an inscribed cylinder seal that can also be considered among the epigraphic material from Palaepaphos-Skales. However, the date of the object is uncertain. This cylinder seal and the two other anepigraphic examples from the same tomb (one of which also has no engraving) are considered by the excavator to be 'no doubt heirlooms and were perhaps kept as magical objects'.⁶¹ This in part relies on an understanding of seals of this type as falling out of use from the 12th century BC onwards,⁶² and suggests that the inscription could be as much as four centuries older than the other grave goods found in the tomb. The inscription consists of two signs, one of which may be damaged.⁶³ Because of the uncertainties over dating and difficulty of reading the inscription, it is excluded from the epigraphic analysis in this chapter.

The inscriptions from Palaepaphos-Skales discussed so far all bear clear visual similarities with the syllabic scripts in use in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages (Cypro-Minoan and the Cypriot Syllabary). One further epigraphic find from the site, however, has very different epigraphic affinities: a ceramic jug found in Tomb 69 bears a number of written signs that appear to be, or to be inspired by, signs of the Phoenician alphabet (Figure 2.8). The jug is of Plain White III ware, a ceramic type that was in use primarily during CGIII (850–750 BC). The signs were incised after firing around the main part of the jug's ovoid-globular body, forming a long sequence in which no recognisable Phoenician words can be read and in which only some of the signs can be identified with certainty as corresponding to known Phoenician signs (while others are either unrecognisable or palaeographically atypical of a particular sign's shape).⁶⁴ Tomb 69 contained at least four burials and was probably in use between the middle of CGII and the beginning of CGIII (c.900–850),⁶⁵ which places the inscription quite close chronologically to the earliest confirmed Phoenician language texts found on the island (discussed in section 2.3.2 below).

⁶¹ Karageorghis (1983) 189 (T.71.1a).

⁶² Webb and Weingarten (2012) 87.

⁶³ Presented in Valério (2014) as inscription ##253.

⁶⁴ Sznycer (1983).

⁶⁵ Karageorghis (1983) 184.



Figure 2.8 Inscribed jug with Phoenician or Phoenician-looking signs.

Taken together, the epigraphic material from the Palaepaphos-Skales cemetery is suggestive not only of an awareness of literacy but also of the value placed on writing by the local population in the Cypro-Geometric period. Inscribed objects were seen as items worthy of inclusion among grave goods in funerary activities. In the case of Tomb 49 at least, in which a concentration of inscriptions was found, it appears that writing may have been associated with status: this is one of the wealthiest tombs in the cemetery and, alongside its rich array of grave goods, three of the inscribed items are bronze obeloi that may be considered as prestige objects. Largely because of the obelos inscribed with a Greek name, *Opheltau*, Tomb 49 has sometimes been assumed to be the tomb of an immigrant Greek speaker, but the tomb type and its overall assemblage militate against this: the name might be Greek, but the obelos along with all the other objects alongside it have strong local parallels and the burial is distinctly Cypriot in manner.⁶⁶ In one case we can show specifically that the assemblage of Tomb 49 originates from a local context: a distinctive vessel of Proto-White Painted ware found in Tomb 49 (T.49.53⁶⁷), whose spout is shaped like a human face with perforations for liquid to pour through, is almost identical to one found in the CG1A (i.e. 1050–1000 BC) Tomb 78 (T.78.23⁶⁸) and is certainly by the same potter, presumably a local one.⁶⁹ The inscriptions found in Tomb 49 clearly form an important concentration of epigraphic material, but they should be seen as fitting in to, not standing out from, the local pattern of burials at the Palaepaphos-Skales cemetery, like the other isolated examples of writing from the site.

2.3.2 Cypro-Geometric Inscriptions from Elsewhere on Cyprus

The concentration of Cypro-Geometric epigraphy at Palaepaphos is significant, but does not necessarily represent a situation in which writing was more important or prevalent at Palaepaphos than in other areas of the island at this time. The inscribed items found in the Skales cemetery were

⁶⁶ Sherratt (2003) 226.

⁶⁷ Karageorghis (1983) plate LIV no. 53.

⁶⁸ Karageorghis (1983) plate CXLIX no. 23.

⁶⁹ Karageorghis (1983) 73.

preserved well because they were discovered in chamber tombs, and found in close proximity precisely because of the concentrated excavation at the site. A variety of other Cypriot inscriptions have been found dating from the Cypro-Geometric period, but none of them originates from such a coherent context as the Palaepaphos material. Nevertheless, these other inscriptions are indicative of wider literacy across Cyprus at the time. They are discussed in this section one by one.

A fragment of a handle belonging to a White Painted jug, dated to the Cypro-Geometric period (which cannot be narrowed further to a sub-period because the size of the fragment makes it difficult to identify the exact ceramic type), was found at Kition in the island's south-east (Figure 2.9). It bears two signs that have good parallels in Cypro-Minoan, separated from each other by a divider in a '1+1' pattern (familiar from some of the Palaepaphos inscriptions: Figures 2.2, 2.5, 2.6 above). The inscription type, both in its position on the vessel and in its '1+1' pattern, has several close parallels in other inscribed vessels from Kition of a slightly earlier date, all falling within LCIII (1220–1050).⁷⁰

Two inscriptions that have been excluded from the present analysis can be mentioned at this point. One is a silver ring from Enkomi of uncertain date (##164), perhaps belonging to the Cypro-Geometric period but perhaps earlier.⁷¹ Its incised signs appear to bear some affinity with known Cypro-Minoan signs but it seems quite unlikely that the inscription dates to the Cypro-Geometric period. Even if the object came from a Cypro-Geometric context, it would be quite possible that the inscription was earlier and the valuable item handed down as an heirloom; the object type also makes this more likely given that inscribed jewellery items made of



Figure 2.9 Inscribed vase handle from Kition (##147).

⁷⁰ ##135, 137, 142, 143.

⁷¹ Courtois (1984) 52–3.

precious metals are otherwise known only from LCIIA (late 15th to early 14th century BC: two gold rings from Kalavassos, ##165–6).

The second excluded item is an iron knife reportedly found in the mines at Limni near Marion and bought by Max Ohnefalsch-Richter in the late 19th century, and dated to a broad chronological range of LCIII–CGII (c.1200–900 BC). The object is missing and no photograph or drawing of the inscription exists.⁷² The inscription reportedly consisted of four signs that appeared to be Cypriot Syllabic (?-*re-o-to*), but the forms of those signs and even the direction of writing remains unknown.⁷³

There is a gap of perhaps 100 years between what is possibly the syllabic inscription of latest date from Palaepaphos-Skales (the stone block from Tomb 67, c.1050–850 BC; [Figure 2.6](#) above) and the next syllabic inscriptions, which appear around the mid-8th century BC, and so at the very end of the Cypro-Geometric period. The 8th-century inscriptions can be identified securely, from an epigraphic perspective, as being written in the Cypriot Syllabic script: they conform closely with the known repertoire of the script's signs during the 8th to 3rd centuries, and they show some innovations that prove they are no longer written in the earlier script, Cypro-Minoan (see [section 2.4](#) below). Strictly speaking, these inscriptions fall just outside our remit in this chapter since none of them is dated before 750, the notional cut-off line between the Cypro-Geometric and Cypro-Archaic periods. However, putting up a boundary between these periods is unhelpful – indeed it could prevent us from seeing which trends continue across the 'divide' and which do not. The appearance of a 'new' script at this time gives the impression of a sudden change in written culture, but as we will see, innovations in epigraphy are accompanied by considerable continuities.

The inscriptions dated probably or certainly to the 8th century are as follows:⁷⁴

- 1 Inscribed stamp seal found not in Cyprus but in Cilicia in southern Anatolia (c.750–700 BC). Two lines (the second intended to be read before the first) in dextroverse (on the seal impression), written in Greek (*ti-we-i-pi-lo-to-?* / *ma-to-te: Diweip^hilō to [sa]mā tode*, 'This is the sign of Diweiphilos'). Also discussed in [Chapter 5, section 5.2.2.](#) ([Figure 2.10.](#))
- 2 Inscribed 'SOS' amphora found not in Cyprus but at Mende in Chalcidice, Greece (c.725–700 BC). One line in sinistroverse, possibly abbreviated,

⁷² See Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 690–1 (Limni 1).

⁷³ See the description in O. Masson (1961/83) no. 172.

⁷⁴ These seven inscriptions are listed in Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 as: Cilicia 13, Greece 1, Paphos 12, Greece 2, Kition 3, Kition 4, Paphos 249. Three inscriptions dated to the 8th–7th centuries (i.e. that may be up to 100 years later than the 8th-century inscriptions) have been excluded from the present analysis: Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Paphos 245, Soloi 3 and No Provenance 61.

possible Greek interpretation ($\text{[} \text{I} \text{q} \text{-si} \text{ // } \text{te-mi} \text{ ' ? se: ... Them}(\text{i}) \text{ Se(laminios)}$, ‘Them(i) the Salaminian’?). Also discussed in [Chapter 5, section 5.2.2](#). ([Figure 2.11](#).)

- 3 Inscribed vase probably from the area north of Kouklia-Paphos (8th century BC). One line (with each sign sitting on top of a decorative circle) probably in dextroverse, probably non-Greek ($\text{to-ro-to-}\varphi\text{-si}$). ([Figure 2.12](#).)
- 4 Inscribed foot of a bronze tripod, shaped like a lion’s foot, found not in Cyprus but at Delphi in Greece (c.700 BC). One line in sinistroverse, Greek personal name (e-re-ma-i-? : $\text{Ermai}(\bar{o})$, ‘Of Ermaios’). Also discussed in [Chapter 5, section 5.2.2](#). ([Figure 2.13](#).)
- 5 Inscribed vase found at Kition in Cyprus (c.700 BC). One line whose direction of writing is uncertain, written in a circle, probably non-Greek ($\text{te-ro-pa-no-to-ta-ko}$ if read in dextroverse, beginning from te in the top-right corner of the image and proceeding anti-clockwise). ([Figure 2.14](#).)



Figure 2.10 Impression of inscribed seal from Cilicia.

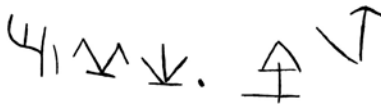


Figure 2.11 SOS amphora inscription from Mende, Chalcidice.



Figure 2.12 Vase inscription from Kouklia-Paphos.



Figure 2.13 Inscribed lion's paw from a decorative tripod from Delphi.



Figure 2.14 Vase inscription from Kition.

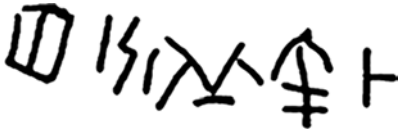


Figure 2.15 Vase fragment inscription from Kition.

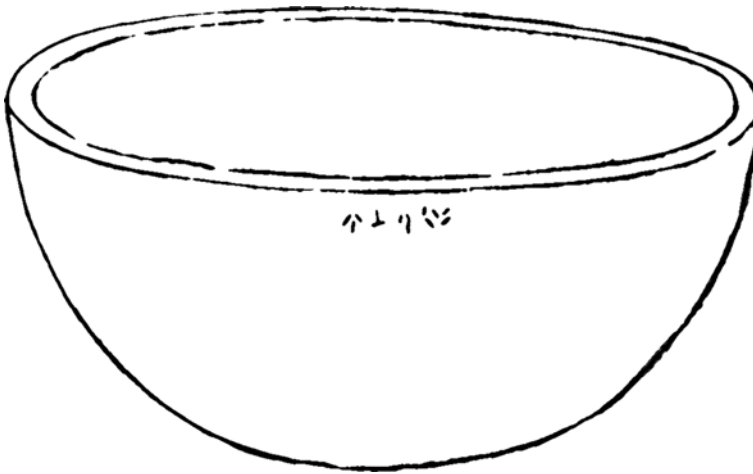


Figure 2.16 Inscribed bronze bowl from Palaepaphos-Skales.

- 6 Inscribed vase fragment found at Kition in Cyprus (c.700 BC). One line probably in dextroverse, probably non-Greek (*mo-ne-mi-si-ta*). (Figure 2.15.)
- 7 Inscribed bronze bowl from Palaepaphos-Skales (c.700 BC). One line in sinistoverse, non-Greek and showing a confirmed Eteocypriot ending (*pi-ḷe-o-ti*). (Figure 2.16.)

The appearance of three of these earliest attested Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions outside of Cyprus itself is striking, and must be suggestive at least of close contact between Cyprus, Anatolia and Greece. The unique appearance of the Cypriot writing system confirms their Cypriot provenance despite their discovery outside the island. It may be no coincidence that they appear at about the same time when other recently developed writing systems were becoming established in Anatolia, Greece and other parts of the Mediterranean: see further [section 2.5](#) below. Also perhaps significant is the fact that, of the 8th-century Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions, all the ones with Greek interpretations were found abroad, while the non-Greek texts were found on Cyprus. With so few inscriptions, however, the significance of this fact is difficult to measure, although it could be that it was particularly the Greek-speaking inhabitants of Cyprus who were in close contact with Greece and Anatolia at the time, or simply that Greek was a language that was useful to use outside Cyprus, given that it was in use elsewhere.

The earliest Phoenician inscriptions found in Cyprus also fall within the Cypro-Geometric period and must be considered in an investigation of literacy on the island at this time. One inscription with Phoenician signs (though perhaps inspired by Phoenician writing rather than a true example of it), which was found on a Plain White III jug from Tomb 69 at Palaepaphos-Skales and dates to c.900–850 BC, has already been mentioned ([Figure 2.8](#) above); despite the problems associated with trying to identify each individual sign, the inscription must at least be a reflex of contemporary Phoenician literacy.

There is also another inscription from Cyprus that has been identified as Phoenician with only partial certainty and, like the Palaepaphos ‘Phoenician’ inscription mentioned in the previous paragraph, does not have a convincing Phoenician interpretation ([Figure 2.17](#)). It is found on the base of a small two-handled jar made of chlorite that was reportedly purchased by Luigi Palma di Cesnola, a 19th-century scholar and collector of Cypriot antiquities, at a bazaar in Nicosia.⁷⁵ Divorced from its find context and of unknown origins, the object cannot be dated accurately, and has been placed by various editors as falling in the 12th or 11th century, or perhaps in the 10th or 9th century BC.⁷⁶ The uncertainties over the date and the reading of the inscription aside, however, this item could again point towards an awareness of Phoenician writing in Early Iron Age Cyprus.

⁷⁵ Di Cesnola (1877) 442.

⁷⁶ See Myres (1914) no. 1540, O. Masson and Sznycer (1972) 128–9, Teixidor (1976) 67, Yon (2004) no. 1127.



Figure 2.17 Chlorite amphoriskos with possible Phoenician inscription.

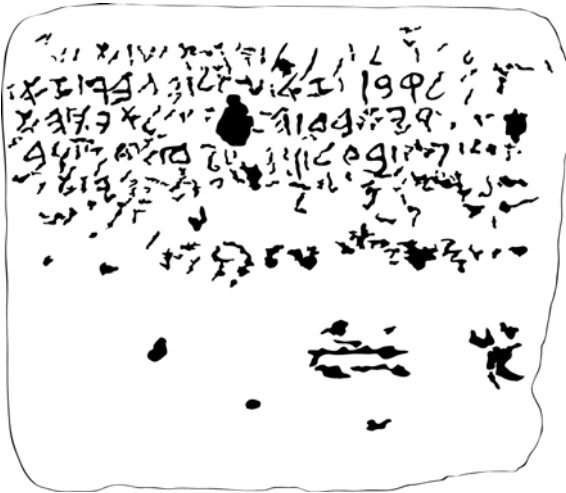


Figure 2.18 Phoenician-inscribed gravestone from Cyprus.

The earliest Cypriot inscriptions written in confirmed Phoenician language and script are dated with more certainty to the 9th century BC, and are likely to have been associated with the settlement of Phoenician

speakers on the island.⁷⁷ One, for example, is a gravestone whose seven-line inscription has been dated to c.900 BC on the basis of its particularly archaic-looking letter forms, and was labelled by Masson and Sznycer as ‘la plus ancienne inscription phénicienne de Chypre’ (Figure 2.18).⁷⁸ The exact provenance of the gravestone is unknown, although it is currently in the collection of the Cyprus Museum in Nicosia and must have originated from somewhere in Cyprus. The inscription is fragmentary, with significant parts of the first four lines legible and traces of another three lines below. Some of its sense can be reconstructed: the name of the deceased does not survive, but it appears to have contained a warning to by-passers not to interfere with the tomb and mentions the god Baal (*B’L*) as well as Edom (*’DM*), probably another deity given the reference here to ‘the hands of Edom’.⁷⁹ The inscription is not only one of the early Cypriot Phoenician texts but also the earliest surviving inscribed gravestone found on the island. Funerary stelai were to become a popular inscription type in the later 1st millennium BC, with many examples in Cypriot Syllabic Greek and in Phoenician, but they are unknown in Cypro-Minoan and were almost certainly a newly introduced concept about the time of the Cypro-Geometric period. While many other inscribed object types show considerable continuity from the Late Bronze Age through to the Cypro-Archaic period, this is one type that looks like a new arrival, and signals one change in epigraphic practice.

Another fragmentary stone inscription, found at Khirokitia in Cyprus, is again dated early on account of its letter forms, perhaps to c.800 BC (Figure 2.19).⁸⁰ Only two letters of the inscription survive, QR[, which could



Figure 2.19 Inscription on stone from Khirokitia.

⁷⁷ See Steele (2013) 175–8.

⁷⁸ O. Masson and Sznycer (1972) 13–20. Palaeographic chronology of this kind has been a particularly common way of dating Phoenician inscriptions, based on the assumed development of letter forms over time: see Peckham (1968a).

⁷⁹ The sequence *’DM* is also attested in the name *’BD’DM* (‘servant of Edom’); see the commentary in O. Masson and Sznycer (1972) 19.

⁸⁰ See O. Masson and Sznycer (1972) 103–5.

possibly be restored as the beginning of the Phoenician word for ‘city’, *QRT* (or could represent the word for ‘wall’, *QR*). What the inscribed item is, it is difficult to tell: it is a large fragment of flat limestone (40×28 cm), often unhelpfully branded a ‘plaque’, with large bold letters incised into it. Another gravestone might be one possibility, but with so little surviving it is difficult to tell. The size of the letters, however, could suggest that it was intended for display.

Some early Phoenician-inscribed fragmentary ceramic vessels have also been found. The earliest is a fragment of Bichrome II ware found at Salamis with only four letters surviving (Figure 2.20). This type of pottery was in use in CGII (c.950–850 BC), and from its find context it appears to belong to the later part of this range, in the 9th century. However, it is difficult to interpret and although it has been suggested to contain a partial reference to a deity (e.g. *ŠTR/T ŠM* ‘he who hears Astarte’),⁸¹ the arrangement of letters makes the inscription difficult to make sense of.

More controversial are some fragments of a Red Slip bowl found at Kition and dated to 800–750 BC, the sense of whose inscription continues to elude us despite many efforts to reconstruct it (Figure 2.21).⁸² The bowl

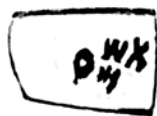


Figure 2.20 Inscribed pottery sherd from Salamis.



Figure 2.21 Inscribed pottery fragments from the temple of Astarte at Kition.

⁸¹ See Sznycer (1980).

⁸² On its date see Bikai (2003) and Yon (2004) no. 1100. For some varying reconstructions of the sense of the inscriptions, see Dupont-Sommer (1970), Teixidor (1972) 434, Coote (1975), Iacovou (2008b) 254, and also Guzzo Amadasi and Karageorghis (1977) no. D 21 for a discussion of different interpretations.

was probably an import, and so its original Cypriot provenance is not assured although it still could have been inscribed in Cyprus. A Cypriot provenance for the inscription is made all the more likely by its find context because it was discovered at the temple of Astarte at Kathari, Kition. The sequence]TRT in the inscription's first line has frequently and plausibly been reconstructed by commentators as 'Š[TRT, the name of the goddess Astarte, suggesting that it was an offering at this local religious site.

Another 8th-century inscription from Kition, this one on a Red Slip Ware jug, was found in a local tomb, suggesting a local provenance for the text (Figure 2.22).⁸³ Its short inscription, consisting of probably one word, is typologically likely to contain a name and mark ownership of the vessel. The sequence of five letters begins with a preposition *L*, which is assumed to mark ownership in this case, although the preposition is used more commonly with a dative function ('to' or 'for' rather than 'of'). The whole sequence reads *L'NTŠ*, which could mean "for 'NTŠ" or "of 'NTŠ", where 'NTŠ represents a personal name or a theonym. However, the name finds no known parallel in Phoenician or even in Greek, and could perhaps be a name of non-Cypriot origin,⁸⁴ or even a local name from the onomastic tradition of a pre-existing language on Cyprus.

The final Phoenician inscriptions dated with confidence to the 8th century are found on some bronze bowl fragments that originate from the



Figure 2.22 Terracotta (Red Slip Ware) jug with Phoenician inscription.

⁸³ See V. and J. Karageorghis (1956) 351–4, Teixidor (1976) 67, Yon (2004) no. 1085.

⁸⁴ See Bonnet (1990).

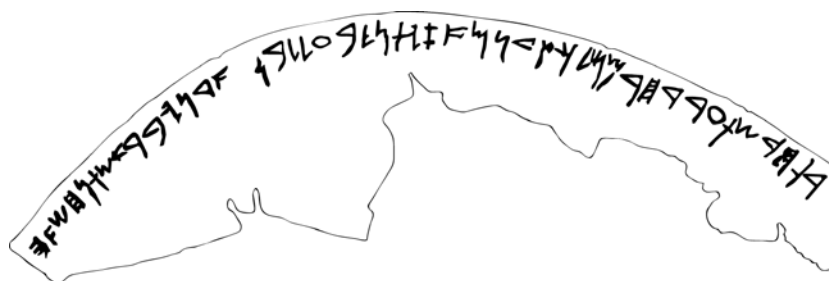


Figure 2.23 Bronze bowl fragments with a Phoenician inscription (Baal of Lebanon).

area of Limassol/Amathus (Figure 2.23). The text of these inscriptions, incised around the rim of the bowls, is perhaps one of the most controversial, if also the most relevant, for the reconstruction of the Phoenician presence on Cyprus because of its reference to a city named Qartihadasht (literally ‘New City’, a common name for a Phoenician foundation that also underlies the name of Carthage). The presumably Cypriot Qartihadasht mentioned in the inscription has most often been argued to have corresponded to Kition, and to indicate an early name and a colonial context for this city, referring to the city’s governor who is labelled as ‘servant of Hiram’ (indicating that he was a vassal of King Hiram II of Tyre, a Phoenician city on the Levantine coast).⁸⁵ Assuming that the city referred to as Qartihadasht was located in Cyprus, the context of the inscriptions is one of local administration and also of religious practice since the text is cast specifically as a dedication to the Phoenician god ‘Baal of Lebanon’ (or ‘Baal of Mt Lebanon’). It is also a relatively unusual Phoenician inscription type,⁸⁶ although in a Cypriot context it looks much more typical: bare inscriptions running around a part of the rim of a metal vessel are well known inscribed in both earlier Cypro-Minoan and the later Cypriot Syllabary. Among other examples, the two inscribed bronze bowls associated with the Palaepaphos-Skales cemetery (Figure 2.7 above) could be considered a typological parallel. This could point towards Phoenician interaction with local Cypriots, with some local influence on the epigraphic habits of Phoenician speakers living on the island.

⁸⁵ See Steele (2013) 231–4 for an overview and discussion of the provenance and significance of the inscriptions.

⁸⁶ The Phoenician-inscribed bronze bowl found in a chamber tomb near Knossos on Crete, dated to the early 9th century BC, does not give a very close parallel. Unlike Cypriot metal vessels inscribed around the rim, the Cretan inscription is below the rim and incorporated into a band of decoration. See Sznycer (1979) and Cross (1980) on this inscription.

2.4 Epigraphic Analysis of the Syllabic Cypro-Geometric Inscriptions

Alongside evidence for cultural continuity, we have already observed that in Cyprus there is evident graphic continuity from the Late Bronze Age, through the Early Iron Age and into the Cypro-Archaic period and beyond. The Phoenician inscriptions mark a departure from this continuity since the Phoenician script was a new arrival on the island in the Geometric period. However, the syllabic writing systems in use across the 2nd and 1st millennia, i.e. Cypro-Minoan and the Cypriot Syllabary, can be shown to be closely related to each other, with the latter safely assumed to have been adapted from the former. The precise details of their relationship with each other nevertheless have been a source of ongoing disagreement in the scholarship on Cypriot scripts, and deserve further elucidation here. A ‘script reform’ is usually assumed to have taken place, i.e. a deliberate redesign of an earlier writing system to produce the later Cypriot Syllabic script, although this process can in itself be questioned. More controversial is the proposed date of such a reform, which depends on our interpretation of the evidence from the Cypro-Geometric period.

We must begin with clarification concerning the inscriptions of the Late Bronze Age that are usually labelled ‘Cypro-Minoan’. These inscriptions are extremely diverse in type and origin, as will be discussed in more detail in the first half of [Chapter 3](#).⁸⁷ Although opinions in scholarship remain divided, quite a convincing demonstration can be made that there were two or three different systems now grouped under the general heading of ‘Cypro-Minoan’, with differences in the overall number and repertoire of signs: the problem of one early inscription (the ‘CM0’ clay tablet ##001) was discussed in [Chapter 1](#), and we can also separate a set of three clay tablets from Enkomi (the ‘CM2’ clay tablets ##207–9), both of which groups may constitute different systems from that found in objects such as the clay balls and Enkomi cylinder (usually ascribed to ‘CM1’).⁸⁸ A further problem here is the substantial degree of palaeographic variation found in the diverse Cypro-Minoan corpus, which means that any given script sign can appear in various different forms (affected by writing implement, writing medium, size of signs, etc.), and consequently it is sometimes difficult to tell whether two given attested signs are variants of the same sign or completely different ones. Studies of palaeographic variation, each reaching different conclusions, have helped to highlight and untangle this issue,⁸⁹ but

⁸⁷ See also Steele (2012).

⁸⁸ On ‘CM1’ and ‘CM2’, see Steele (2013) 30–5, (2014a).

⁸⁹ Already Daniel (1941), followed by É. Masson (1972), (1974), Olivier (2007), (2013), Palaima (1989a), Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1, Steele (2013) 22–47, Valério (2016).

with a small corpus of nearly 250 very diverse texts it has not been possible to reach any consensus.

Underlying our uncertainties about the coherence of Cypro-Minoan and the possible existence of different scripts is the question of writing systems and their context. Writing systems are often subject to processes of standardisation, which is to say that they are used in particular contexts that have an effect on the degree of variation tolerated. In an administrative setting, for example, it might be desirable for there to be relatively little variation in the shapes of individual signs, and for the whole repertoire of signs to be known well by each of the system's users. Better understood writing systems in other areas of the ancient world demonstrate such standardisation processes, usually achieved in administrative contexts through some sort of scribal training: in the Late Bronze Age Aegean, for example, palaeographic study of Linear B enables us to reconstruct aspects that were standardised through training,⁹⁰ while in the ancient Near East we have a great deal of information about how scribal training in different forms of cuneiform worked, alongside large numbers of texts that were used for teaching and learning.⁹¹

For Cypro-Minoan, however, we have neither sufficient numbers of texts to study broader trends in palaeographic variation, nor documentary evidence to tell us about how people learnt to write. This does not mean that we cannot make progress in an attempt to understand the circumstances in which many Cypro-Minoan texts were written, but it does make it difficult to be certain whether one or multiple writing systems was/were in use, whether there was any drive to standardise writing, and, if so, in what contexts this took place. So, when we try to reconstruct the progression from what we call Cypro-Minoan writing in the Late Bronze Age to what we call the Cypriot Syllabary in the 1st millennium BC, it is not immediately obvious what sort of Cypro-Minoan provided the template for the development of the new script.

The Cypriot Syllabic script, which makes its first certain appearances in 8th-century BC inscriptions, had two quite standardised varieties: one variant belonging to the area of Paphos and usually written from left to

⁹⁰ On Linear B palaeography generally, see Palaima (2011), and for a more specific recent study focusing on the undeciphered Linear B signs, see Judson (2016). On scribal training in Linear B, see Duhoux (2011). On differences in context and standardisation between the Aegean and Cyprus, see Steele (2016a).

⁹¹ Publications on scribal training in the Near East are too numerous to list here, but for an overview of questions relating to cuneiform literacy and training, see Veldhuis (2011). The centre of cuneiform writing closest to Cyprus in the Late Bronze Age was Ugarit (where Cypro-Minoan inscriptions have also been discovered); on scribal training in the cuneiform alphabet developed at Ugarit, see Hawley (2008).

right (dextroverse) and one used across the rest of the island and usually written from right to left (sinistroverse). The former is referred to as ‘Paphian’ and the latter as ‘Common’. The new script in both its incarnations had about 55 signs, marking what is probably a reduction in the number of signs from its direct ancestor (see further [Chapter 3, section 3.2](#)), whichever sort of Cypro-Minoan that was. Although the two variants of the Cypriot Syllabary have approximately the same number of signs (not counting one or two rarer signs attested in only one script or the other), their repertoires differ in that some sign values are represented by signs of different shape (not palaeographically, although again there are considerable palaeographic divergences between Common and Paphian Cypriot Syllabic, but in the basic shape of the signs, e.g. Common *o*  versus Paphian *o* ).

The evidence suggests that the two varieties of the Cypriot Syllabary were not always fully distinct categories. Early Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions show some variation in their repertoire (and their direction of writing) and suggest that the Common and Paphian syllabaries were not fully formed from the beginning: these must be diverging categories that became separate entities over time. The motivation behind the standardisation of the two distinct systems was probably related to the political configuration of the island, with independent city states in different areas, of which Paphos was one of the major players. However, the use of the two standardised scripts was not the preserve of the political elite alone: by the time of the graffiti left by Cypriot mercenaries at the Egyptian temple of Achoris at Karnak in the 4th century BC, for example, knowledge of their distinct repertoires and directions had clearly become a matter of local pride (discussed further in [Chapter 5, section 5.2.2](#) s.v. Egypt).

The syllabic inscriptions belonging to the Cypro-Geometric period, between the mid-11th and mid-8th centuries BC, have been disputed: are they late Cypro-Minoan⁹² or early Cypriot Syllabic?⁹³ An analysis of the individual signs in the inscriptions from Palaepaphos and Kition can help us to consider not only whether we can answer the question but also whether it is a question worth asking. Caution is important here because with so few inscriptions from this period we can only make anachronistic comparisons with earlier or later inscriptions, and the scripts in which they are written, and not with contemporaries. The sign correspondences for the inscriptions are given in [Table 2.2](#) below.⁹⁴

⁹² E.g. Olivier (2008), (2013), Egetmeyer (2013).

⁹³ E.g. É. and O. Masson (1983), Duhoux (2012).

⁹⁴ In each case, the assumed corresponding Cypro-Minoan or Cypriot Syllabic sign is displayed, with its number or value. However, it is important to remember that using ‘normalised’ versions of signs may be misleading, especially for Cypro-Minoan where we have an imperfect understanding of palaeographic variations, as cautioned above.

Table 2.2 Sign correspondences for the Cypro-Geometric inscriptions from Palaepaphos and Kition.

Inscription	Signs of the inscription	Correspondences with known Cypro-Minoan signs	Correspondences with known Cypriot Syllabic signs
Obelos from Skales Tomb 49, ##170 (<i>Opheltau</i>)		064	Common-only <i>o</i>
		011	Common/Paphian <i>pe</i>
		024	Paphian-only <i>le</i>
		004	Common/Paphian <i>ta</i>
		012	Paphian-only <i>u</i>
Obelos from Skales Tomb 49, ##171		023	Common/Paphian <i>ti</i>
		023	Common/Paphian <i>ti</i>
Obelos from Skales Tomb 49, ##172		007 ??	-
		097	Paphian <i>ro</i> ^a
Stone block from Skales Tomb 49, ##189		102	Common/Paphian <i>a</i>
		017	Common/Paphian <i>nu</i>
Stone block from Skales Tomb 67, ##190		109	Common-only <i>wa</i>
		023	Common/Paphian <i>ti</i>
Bronze bowl from Skales Tomb 235, ##254		102	Common/Paphian <i>a</i>
		109	Common-only <i>wa</i>
		004	Common/Paphian <i>ta</i>
		008/013, ^b	Paphian <i>to</i>
		023	Common/Paphian <i>ti</i>
		110	Common/Paphian <i>ku</i>
		023	Common/Paphian <i>ti</i>
Bronze bowl from Skales, surface find, ##186		082	Common/Paphian <i>sa</i>
		006	Common/Paphian <i>pa</i>

Table 2.2 (Cont.)

Inscription	Signs of the inscription	Correspondences with known Cypro-Minoan signs	Correspondences with known Cypriot Syllabic signs
Vase handle fragment from Kition, ##147		082 	Common/Paphian <i>sa</i> 
		088 	Common/Paphian <i>la</i> 
		023 	Common/Paphian <i>ti</i> 
		023 	Common/Paphian <i>ti</i> 
		107 	Common/Paphian <i>ma</i> 

^a Palaeographically this is closest to the Paphian variant of *ro*, but NB the Common variant is essentially the same sign shape but more curved: .

^b This is the sign traditionally labelled 008 (related to the Linear A and B *to* signs: ) and distinguished from sign 013 (related to the Linear A and B *na* signs: ) by the absence of a gap between the two horizontal lines at the top. This angular version , along with another where the vertical was upright but shifted to one side () was understood as a variant of sign 008. However, Valerio (2013) has proposed a different way of understanding the palaeographic variation of these signs in Cypro-Minoan that involves reclassifying some of the variants, hence the numeration here of 008/013; his argument is that it is not the presence or absence of the gap between the horizontals that was significant but the repositioning of the vertical line. This illustrates well the problem of understanding palaeographic variation in a limited corpus.

All of the inscriptions listed in the table have been included as examples of Cypro-Minoan by Olivier,⁹⁵ with the exception of recently discovered ##254 (also considered as Cypro-Minoan⁹⁶), a categorisation that has now met general (though not universal) acceptance.⁹⁷ However, as Table 2.2 makes clear, almost all the signs appearing in these Cypro-Geometric inscriptions have sound correspondences both with earlier attested signs (Cypro-Minoan) and with later attested signs (Cypriot Syllabic). In many cases, a particular sign will look closer to one or the other. For example, in the case of the stone block found blocking the stomion of Tomb 49 at Palaepaphos-Skales (##189), the first sign  looks closer to the most common form of the Cypro-Minoan corresponding sign than the Cypriot Syllabic one, while the second sign  looks closer to the Cypriot Syllabic than to the Cypro-Minoan. It is important to remember here that we have plentiful evidence with which to reconstruct the signary of the later Cypriot Syllabic script, drawing on at least 1,300 inscriptions of which some are quite long, while the same cannot be said for Cypro-Minoan for the reasons

⁹⁵ Olivier (2007).
⁹⁶ Egetmeyer (2016).
⁹⁷ See also Olivier (2008) 608, (2013) 16–19.

described above. In such a situation, how can we decide whether these few chronologically isolated inscriptions are written in one script or another?

One way of attempting to classify the inscriptions is to ask whether they share any of the innovations of the Cypriot Syllabary.⁹⁸ If they did, then we could say that they should only have arisen after the script reform by which the Cypriot Syllabary was created – assuming that there was a deliberate reform at all. For this method, we must discount innovations that are only palaeographic: the apparently ‘advanced’ shape of the *nu* / 017 in the stone block from Tomb 49 (##189) is no more telling than the apparently ‘archaic’ shape of the *a* / 102 in the same inscription. We know this because there are Late Bronze Age Cypro-Minoan inscriptions that already show advanced sign forms, for example incorporating the phenomenon of H > X reduction by which several signs seem to have changed over time, including the ones that survive into the Cypriot Syllabary as *a* (𐎠 > 𐎡) and *i* (𐎢 > 𐎣). Equally, archaic-looking sign forms can be found in later inscriptions such as the Cypro-Minoan-looking *ti* in one of the earliest attested unquestionably Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions, the seal found in Cilicia (Figure 2.10 above: 𐎠𐎢). Again in the later texts, the Paphian-looking *to* attested twice in the 8th-century vase inscription from Paphos (where it appears as 𐎠𐎢) is not an innovated form as Egetmeyer had previously suggested,⁹⁹ but is in fact well attested in Cypro-Minoan inscriptions, as acknowledged by Egetmeyer in his edition of the recently discovered CGI bronze bowl inscription;¹⁰⁰ this sign form alone therefore cannot be used to confirm that an inscription is beyond doubt a Cypriot Syllabic one. The most controversial of all the signs in the earlier Cypro-Geometric inscriptions, the *pe* 𐎠 of the *Opheltau* obelos, should perhaps also be considered as a palaeographic variant of a pre-existing sign, Cypro-Minoan 011 𐎠, with an appearance also affected by the fact that this would be the only surviving example of sign 011 scratched onto hard metal rather than impressed in soft clay with a stylus.¹⁰¹

If we discount so-called ‘advanced’ forms judged by palaeographic variation in the exact form of the signs, the eight Cypro-Geometric inscriptions do not feature any known Cypriot Syllabic innovations. There is no example of any sign that we know or suspect to be a pure Cypriot Syllabic innovation (e.g. *tu* 𐎠𐎢, apparently based on *to* 𐎠𐎢 but incorporating extra strokes, or *xe* 𐎠𐎢, which is not attested until quite late in the history of

⁹⁸ This is the approach taken also in Egetmeyer (2013).

⁹⁹ Egetmeyer (2013) 117.

¹⁰⁰ Egetmeyer (2016) 132–3.

¹⁰¹ See Olivier (2013) 16–19 and discussed in Steele (2013) 90–7. Duhoux (2012), however, takes a different approach and considers the sign a Cypriot Syllabic innovation.

Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions). We can also note that signs in the seven Cypro-Geometric Palaepaphos inscriptions have correspondences with both Common-only and Paphian-only Cypriot Syllabic signs, which shows that the texts pre-date the division of the Cypriot Syllabary into these two branches. However, this does not mean that they are Cypro-Minoan. They could still be written in the Cypriot Syllabary, because there are still inscriptions that defy the Common versus Paphian dichotomy in the early attested stages of the script from the 8th century BC onwards (e.g. Common inscriptions featuring Paphian-only signs, or Paphian inscriptions that read sinistroverse instead of the usual dextroverse); in fact, another inscribed bronze bowl from Palaepaphos-Skales, but dated to the early Cypro-Archaic period (c.700), displays just such a ‘mixture’, since it reads in sinistroverse but includes a Paphian *o* : [Figure 2.16](#) above. The surviving evidence does not give us sufficient reason to label any of the early Cypro-Geometric inscriptions as Cypro-Minoan or Cypriot Syllabic.

This brings us back full circle to the question of whether it is worth trying to categorise these inscriptions at all. We can say with some certainty at least that they do not prove that the reform by which the Cypriot Syllabic script was created had already happened, nor that it had not yet happened, by the time they were written. It could be argued that, since they show no evidence of innovations in the overall repertoire/structure of the signary, it is more economical to assume that they are written in Cypro-Minoan. This may suggest that the script reform had not yet happened, since the new script would then not be attested before the 8th century BC, on the cusp of the Archaic period (with the inscriptions in [Figures 2.10–2.16](#) above representing the earliest surviving examples). Linguistic concerns, for example the fact that the Cypriot Syllabary did not have a series of signs for labiovelar consonants (i.e. /k^w/, /k^{wh}/, /g^w/: sounds that were still present in Mycenaean Greek in the Late Bronze Age but had dropped out by later attested Greek) could point towards a later rather than earlier date for the creation of the new script.¹⁰² However, this is not direct proof that the Cypro-Geometric inscriptions are Cypro-Minoan rather than Cypriot Syllabic, though it could make the suggestion more likely; on the other hand, given that we have no other way of dating linguistic developments, they do not make a very firm foundation for deciding whether a script was created 100–200 years earlier or later. We could even validly ask a different question, namely whether there was ever a deliberate script reform: is it

¹⁰² Egetmeyer (2013). For a fuller consideration of the material from the Cypro-Geometric period, see also Egetmeyer (2017).

possible that we are instead dealing with ‘a script continuum with evolving sign forms’?¹⁰³

Rather than declaring one category or another to be the ‘correct’ one, it may be better to admit that we do not know exactly how the early Cypro-Geometric inscriptions relate to earlier and later ones, although they clearly belong to the evolving tradition of syllabic writing on Cyprus. Another way of approaching the question of the script reform that has frequently been overlooked in scholarly discussions is treated in the [next section](#): namely, the context of the reform within the diachronic framework of literacy on Cyprus.

2.5 Epigraphic Culture and Continuity across the Cypro-Geometric Period

The consideration of sign forms conducted in the last section might seem to lead to a somewhat negative conclusion: the syllabic inscriptions of the Cypro-Geometric period do not give sufficient evidence to allow us to place them, beyond doubt, in one epigraphic group or another. The precise identification of epigraphic categories is, in any case, an exercise that invites anachronism given that the categories are largely our modern labels and not necessarily ones that ancient script users would have recognised; if we leave this question aside, we can glean many more positives. We know that there were groups of literate individuals present on Cyprus throughout the Cypro-Geometric period. We know some of the sorts of objects that people were writing on at this time, and some of the inscription types they were creating. We know that sometimes writing appeared on high-status objects, and that inscribed items could be considered valuable enough, in some sense, to be buried with the dead. In the case of the *Op^heltau* inscription we even know that at least on one occasion syllabic writing at this time was used to record the Greek language, while the other contemporary inscriptions are likely to be non-Greek. If we also include the Phoenician inscriptions from the island, we can add a further language and further inscription types such as the gravestone. At the end of the period, we know that Cypriots were using syllabic writing for Greek and for one or more unidentified languages (the latter potentially continuing language groups of the Late Bronze Age). When assembled and examined, the epigraphic evidence we have for the Cypro-Geometric period points to a social situation where writing was used both for elite purposes (such as the

¹⁰³ Posed in Egetmeyer (2013) 121.

recording of a name on a prestige item like a bronze obelos) and for more practical purposes (such as the marking of pottery vessels presumably in a more economic or quotidian context). We also know, or at least can assume, what writing was not used for at this time, and that is monumental/political inscriptions of the type that become commonplace under the regimes of the later city kingdoms to mark political events and royal dedications; nothing of this type is attested on Cyprus until the 5th century BC and later.

A broader diachronic, or ‘macrohistoric’, approach can inform our assessment in even greater detail. If we compare the Cypro-Geometric inscriptions with inscriptions from the Late Bronze Age and the Archaic period, a number of ruptures and continuities become obvious. In the category of ruptures are the appearance of new cultural features evident in the material record, including some new mortuary patterns, and, in the epigraphic record, the appearance of new languages in Cyprus (Greek and Phoenician) and the appearance of what we label as the new Cypriot Syllabic script by the beginning of the Archaic period. Some previous epigraphic practices were abandoned, probably by the beginning of the Cypro-Geometric period, most notably writing on particular clay objects such as tablets, balls, labels and cylinders that had played an important role in Late Bronze Age Cypriot literacy: the clay ball of latest date is one belonging to the mid-11th century BC, but many of these objects are not attested beyond the 12th. To some extent, this may mark a move away from older administrative practices that employed clay documentation. The common Cypriot practice of marking vase handles with Cypro-Minoan inscriptions (itself perhaps a reflex of wider traditions of potmarking related to trade) also disappeared about this time, and the Cypro-Geometric inscribed handle from Kition ([Figure 2.9](#)) is the last attested example. In the glyptic tradition, cylinder seals, which had sometimes been inscribed in Cypro-Minoan, had gone out of use by the end of the Late Bronze Age to be replaced with stamp seals (an inscribed example of which appears among the earliest Cypro-Archaic inscriptions: [Figure 2.10](#)).¹⁰⁴ All these changes could be and have frequently been interpreted as signifiers of a major disruption between the Bronze and Iron Ages on Cyprus.

However, continuities in epigraphic practice are in many ways more striking than the discontinuities, and all the more so when considering that they were not disturbed by the introduction of new ideas, languages and writing systems. Most obvious is the use of a distinctive syllabic writing system, whatever degree of reform it underwent over the years. This is an

¹⁰⁴ On stamp seals, see Reyes (2001). Cylinder seals were discussed in more detail in [Chapter 1](#).

undeniable indication that writing was passed on continuously from one generation to another, despite some of the changes in inscription types and traditions of writing described in the previous paragraph. It also probably points towards widespread use of writing beyond elite and administrative circles, so that changes in administration did not impact on the existence of literacy, as they clearly did for example in post-Mycenaean Greece when the palaces fell and the principal context of literacy was lost.¹⁰⁵ Another continuity can be detected in the geographical spread of writing on Cyprus: Palaepaphos and Kition have both produced syllabic written material from the Late Bronze Age, Geometric, Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods (close to 1,000 years of continuity). This tells us at the very least that literacy at Palaepaphos and Kition continued unbroken, and may point towards particularly favourable conditions for the continuation of writing traditions at these two long-lived urban sites that were to become two of the most powerful city kingdoms of Iron Age Cyprus.

A closer look at some of the inscriptions reveals that the continuities run deeper than a geographically determined stability of literacy. For example, some remarkable stability can be found in inscription types. Both Palaepaphos and Kition have produced Cypro-Geometric syllabic inscriptions of the ‘1+1’ type, containing just two signs separated by a word divider. One obelos and two stone blocks from Palaepaphos and an inscribed vase handle from Kition all share this inscription type (Figures 2.2, 2.5, 2.6, 2.9 above). A bronze bowl from Palaepaphos also seems to include a ‘1+1’ sequence at the end, following another word and a numeral (Figure 2.7a). In the Cypro-Minoan corpus of the Late Bronze Age, numerous examples of this inscription pattern are preserved on items including pottery vessels,¹⁰⁶ a clay ball,¹⁰⁷ bronze ingots¹⁰⁸ and a bronze kidney-shaped votive object.¹⁰⁹ Hundreds of years later, now undeniably in the new Cypriot Syllabic script, ‘1+1’ inscriptions were still being employed and are attested in considerable numbers in the Paphos area: a bronze strainer and a jug that were both found in tombs dated to the 7th century BC show the pattern,¹¹⁰ as do 18 inscribed stone drums found at the

¹⁰⁵ In postpalatial Greece, the only signs of literacy arise specifically from contact with the eastern Mediterranean: see Steele (*forthcoming*).

¹⁰⁶ ##135, 137, 142, 143, 236. All found in Olivier (2007) except for ##236, which appears only in Ferrara (2012/13).

¹⁰⁷ ##061.

¹⁰⁸ ##174, 175, 176. Ferrara and Bell (2016) discuss these inscriptions in connection with Cypriot ‘branding’ of metal trade.

¹⁰⁹ ##167.

¹¹⁰ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Paphos 162, 165. See O. Masson and Mitford (1986) 104–5 (nos. 233, 236).

Kouklia site.¹¹¹ Even in these examples written in the later, deciphered script, the exact function of the ‘1+1’ pattern is elusive. Across the whole chronological span of its attestation, the pattern is found on a range of objects, of which some could be from religious contexts (e.g. the Late Bronze Age bronze kidney or the Archaic stone drums), some were found in tombs (the Palaepaphos stone blocks and bronze bowl and the strainer and jug from Archaic Paphos) and some appear on more ‘everyday’ objects (e.g. the vase handles and perhaps the clay ball).¹¹² This diversity strongly suggests that the inscription type could be used in multiple contexts and was not determined solely by them, a factor that could also explain the longevity of the formula despite the arrival of new languages and creation of new scripts and writing traditions. We can only guess at the formula’s meaning, but it is likely to be some sort of abbreviation. One plausible suggestion is that it is an abbreviation for a name (name + patronym?).¹¹³

We can also observe some important continuities in inscribed object type. Although the inscribed items of the Cypro-Geometric period show some diversity, one particular object type can be witnessed to make frequent appearances from the Late Bronze Age through to the 4th century BC: the inscribed metal bowl. We have already seen one example of an inscribed bronze bowl that was found in a tomb at Palaepaphos-Skales and another that was a surface find at the same cemetery (Figure 2.7a–b), the former ascribed to the Cypro-Geometric period with confidence and the latter less so, both with very close parallels in Late Bronze Age inscribed bowls of both bronze and silver.¹¹⁴ The writing on these plain vessels tends to run around part of the rim. Later on, in the Archaic period, metal vessels continue to be inscribed, with the position of the writing near the rim sometimes still maintained although the signs were often incorporated more obviously into patterns on the more elaborately decorative bowls and dishes. We have already seen a late 8th-century example from Paphos (Figure 2.16), and dating to the 8th to 7th centuries there is also another example on a bronze bowl from Paphos and three on silver vessels from the Kourion treasure.¹¹⁵ The decorated metal bowls are usually considered to be inspired by Phoenician vessel types and decorative patterns, although often mixing

¹¹¹ Listed under Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Paphos 144. See O. Masson and Mitford (1986) 75–82 (nos. 115–32).

¹¹² See also É. Masson (1979) 399–404.

¹¹³ See e.g. Mitford (1961) 4.

¹¹⁴ Inscriptions ##178–83.

¹¹⁵ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Paphos 245, Kourion 2–4.

Cypriot, Near Eastern and Egyptianising motifs, in particular from the 9th century BC onwards.¹¹⁶ The function of the Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions on the bowls can be assessed more easily because they are relatively long inscriptions in a deciphered script, showing that they usually record or pertain to the owner of the bowl.¹¹⁷ These ones from the Archaic period are probably all inscriptions marking ownership, but some later examples with religious dedications demonstrate that other inscription types on these objects are also possible. A 5th-century bronze bowl from Vouni is inscribed with a dedication to Athena, while a 4th-century example from Chytroi bears a dedication to (Apollo) Hylates and one of similar date from Pyrga may perhaps be included among the religious texts since its inscription states that it belongs to a priest.¹¹⁸ A further example of a Cypriot Syllabic inscribed bronze bowl, of which only a fragment survives preserving text around the rim, was found outside Cyprus at Athens and probably dates to the early 5th century or earlier.¹¹⁹

Metal bowls with syllabic inscriptions, usually in bronze but occasionally in silver, persisted from the Late Bronze Age through to the 4th century BC on Cyprus. However, this does not quite tell the whole story of this inscribed object type. We have already seen two more similar bronze bowls of the Cypro-Geometric period, inscribed not in a syllabic script but in Phoenician, and surviving in fragments that when pieced together reveal a text pertaining to the governor of the city of Qartihadast (Figure 2.23 above). Although written in a recently arrived language and script, this inscribed object looks altogether in keeping with Cypriot inscription types and could suggest multi-way influences in the practice of writing between speakers of local languages and speakers of Greek and Phoenician. Phoenician-inscribed metal bowls are not entirely unknown elsewhere, with a famous example, dated probably to the 9th century (in part by its palaeography, in part by its context), discovered in Tomb J at Tekke on Crete. Its inscription is somewhat damaged but preserves a sequence *KS* reconstructed as the Phoenician word for ‘cup’, suggesting it is a declaration of ownership (‘I am the cup of X’).¹²⁰ Although there has been a tendency to ascribe the Cretan example to a settled Phoenician living in Crete at this time, it is perhaps more likely

¹¹⁶ See Markoe (1985), Vella (2010), Vonhoff (2015).

¹¹⁷ Another example of unknown provenance is published in Schmitt (1991).

¹¹⁸ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Vouni 2, Chytroi 19, Pyrga 1.

¹¹⁹ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Greece 4, Karnava (2013) 165–6 and fig. 8. The three signs of the inscription could perhaps be completed to read *pa-si]-le-wo-se*, ‘of the king ...’.

¹²⁰ See Sznycer (1979). Other interpretations have also been proposed, such as a dedication (e.g. Lipiński (2004) 182).

that it was an import, especially considering the wealth of other imported items found alongside it in the same tomb.¹²¹ In fact, owing to its appearance and shape, this bowl is widely thought to be Cypriot in origin.

Inscribed metal bowls dating from the earlier part of the 1st millennium BC have been found in other areas outside Cyprus and written in a variety of scripts: these include Etruria in Italy (Phoenician), Nimrud in Assyria (Phoenician, Aramaic, Akkadian) and Olympia (Aramaic) and Tragana (Hieroglyphic Luwian) in Greece. These vessels tend to be inscribed with declarations of ownership like some of the others already discussed, and it has been argued that they need to be understood in the context of broader patterns of drinking and libation practices in the Mediterranean and Near East, with ownership inscriptions as a marker of elite cultural memory and identity.¹²² The use of different languages and writing systems in metal bowl inscriptions, rather than signifying ‘linguistic divides that ultimately result in ethnic differentiation’,¹²³ seems to point towards practices that transcended local community groups and were shared and passed on around different parts of the Mediterranean, and is probably a testament to the high levels of communication and interaction that mark out the Early Iron Age. Already in the Late Bronze Age, a silver bowl from Hala Sultan Tekke in Cyprus bears an inscription in neither a local syllabic script nor the Phoenician script, but rather in the ‘short’ Ugaritic cuneiform alphabet; inscribed in a North-West Semitic language (arguably something closer to Phoenician than to Ugaritic itself) and written in sinistroverso (unlike the main corpus of Ugaritic cuneiform texts),¹²⁴ it marks ownership of the bowl by a man named as Aky son of Yaptihaddou.¹²⁵ The Cypriot practice of inscribing metal bowls evidently was not taking place in a vacuum in the Late Bronze Age and into the Iron Age, and the island was playing a role in much wider trends in writing and prestige objects. Nevertheless, it is striking that Cyprus is the only area where the practice continued, possibly unbroken, for 800 years or more. It not only continued but also changed over time, for example incorporating more decorative styles when they became popular and eventually including dedicatory as well as ownership inscriptions.

¹²¹ See e.g. Szymer (1979) 89, Hoffmann (1997) 12.

¹²² Feldman (2014) ch. 4.

¹²³ Feldman (2014) 136.

¹²⁴ On the few inscriptions that seem to be written in a variant of the Ugaritic cuneiform alphabet with some 22 rather than the usual 27/30 signs, see Dietrich, Loretz and Sanmartín (1976).

¹²⁵ See Bordreuil (1983) and Yon (2004) no. 7001. Steel (2013) 30, however, sees it as a maker inscription rather than one denoting ownership.

A similar mixture of internal Cypriot innovation and continuity alongside exposure to outside influences is evident if we consider writing across the Mediterranean in the 8th century BC. At this time, alphabetic writing systems derived from Phoenician make their first appearances: most famously the Greek alphabet, but the closely related alphabets that appear in Phrygia¹²⁶ and Italy¹²⁷ about the same time cannot be ignored and should be seen as part of the same series of developments. It may not be a coincidence that it is during the 8th century BC that Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions (some in Greek, others in unidentified language) begin to appear in force, just when early alphabetic inscriptions are starting to appear in significant numbers elsewhere in the Mediterranean. There are local peculiarities in inscription types at this time: for example, stamp seals and inscribed metal vessels in Cyprus (e.g. the ones in [Figures 2.10](#) and [2.16](#)), ‘literary’ inscriptions that make clear reference to an oral poetic tradition in Greece¹²⁸ and gift inscriptions that again were arguably inspired by local oral traditions in Etruria.¹²⁹ However, there are also certain inscription types that are common to all these areas, of which incised graffiti and dipinti on ceramic vessels are overwhelmingly the most popular. Typologically, these are very likely to consist of or include personal names, especially the graffiti (i.e. ones incised after the pot was made, rather than painted as part of its decoration), and many examples of this broader practice can be found in Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions throughout the 1st millennium BC. A move towards writing on pottery vessels associated with feasting and symposia may point towards shared trends in the appropriation of writing as a means of marking elite cultural activities in communal spaces. This might be one of the reasons why writing seems to become more visible at this time both in Cyprus and elsewhere, if its use was sometimes connected with status display.

A specific comparison between the development of the Greek alphabet and that of the Cypriot Syllabary is potentially also quite elucidating. There are clear differences in the situations in these two areas: while Greece had

¹²⁶ A few of the Phrygian inscriptions from Gordion probably belong to the later 9th century BC (G-03, G-104, G-237, G-249), making them the earliest to appear: see Brixhe (2004) 276–7. The texts are collected in Brixhe and Lejeune (1984).

¹²⁷ The earliest appearance of an alphabetic text in Italy is one dated to c.770 BC from Gabii near Rome.

¹²⁸ On the relationship between orality and fledgling literacy in Greece, see Thomas (1992). The importance of the oral/‘literary’ tradition as an impetus, or *the* impetus, for the acquisition of writing in Greece at this time has, however, sometimes been overstated: e.g. Powell (1991), (2002).

¹²⁹ See Maras (2015), (forthcoming).

been illiterate since the fall of the Mycenaean palaces, we know that writing on Cyprus continued without any break. So, when Greek speakers outside Cyprus wanted to develop a writing system, they had to look for an external stimulus and chose the Phoenician script, whereas on Cyprus there was a pre-existing literate tradition that could be adapted and moulded to new uses. However, there is a question mark over what happened when Greeks adopted writing from the Phoenicians, because if we look at the Greek alphabet in its various attestations around Greece, the islands and other areas where Greek speakers settled such as Italy, what we find is that there were some significant differences in each of the local alphabets: we are dealing not with a single source script and a single adapted script, but rather with a variety of different results of the adaptation. Although the different local alphabets of Geometric-Archaic Greece share a core repertoire, including letters that were innovated after borrowing the script from Phoenicians such as the five basic vowel signs, there were some significant local differences in the phonetic values ascribed to particular letters and to the ‘supplementary’ letters added on at the end of the alphabetic sequence. For example, alphabets categorised as ‘green’ like the Cretan one lacked the supplemental signs *phi/chi/psi* altogether, while those categorised as ‘red’ like the Euboean and ‘blue’ ones like the Ionic both possessed these supplementals but ascribed to them different values (e.g. *X chi* representing /ks/ in red alphabets but /k^h/ in blue alphabets).¹³⁰ This diversity remains to be accounted for.¹³¹

The early development of the Greek alphabet is difficult to reconstruct: we do not know, for example, the place or date of its adaptation from Phoenician, nor its precise relationship with other alphabets such as Phrygian and Etruscan.¹³² We do not know whether there was a single point of adaptation creating an ‘Uralphabet’ from which the diverse local alphabets are all descended (the theory of ‘monogenesis’¹³³), whether there

¹³⁰ The colour-coding of the local alphabets stems from a map published by Albert Kirchhoff in the 19th century. For an expansive treatment of the local alphabets and the texts written in them, see Jeffery (1990). On the adaptation of particular letters from Phoenician, see Woodard (2010).

¹³¹ See for example the discussions in Wachter (1989), Luraghi (2010) and Johnston (2012). For a comparison of the development of the Greek alphabet with the Cypriot scripts, see also Egetmeyer (2017) 199–201.

¹³² One recent treatment of these problems can be found in Janko (2015), although his conclusions, while forcefully argued, give only one side of a continuing debate. The papers in Parker, Crowther and Steele (forthcoming) are testament to the potential for further fruitful contributions to this debate, especially in the light of recent and hopefully future discoveries of early alphabetic texts; see also Steele (forthcoming).

¹³³ E.g. Guarducci (1967), Powell (1991). Many supporters of this theory see the shared innovation of the five vowel signs as ‘proof’ of monogenesis.

were several different adaptations perhaps in different places at different times ('polygenesis'¹³⁴) or whether diversity in script repertoire and sign values was an integral feature of the alphabet from its inception (perhaps driven by quick communication across Greece and the Mediterranean¹³⁵). One could write a whole book on this problem (as several scholars have) and there is not space here to do more than touch upon the central issues. However, once we move past the point(s) of adaptation, the question of the existence of different local alphabets becomes easier to account for, however they first began. We need to think about their social and political context in order to understand their diversity:¹³⁶ local differences could be tolerated and even celebrated because of the political diversity of the Greek landscape in the Geometric, Archaic and even Classical periods, and consequently there was no drive for a standardised or centralised writing system across Greece until there was a corresponding move towards political unification (in particular under and following Alexander the Great, when a standardised common or 'Koine' alphabet was proliferated). In the very early stages, in the 8th and 7th centuries BC, it is likely that this context of political diversity was not yet strongly associated with writing, in part probably because of the restriction of writing to local contexts: surviving evidence suggests that writing was not being used for communication across the whole Greek-speaking community. This could explain why we sometimes see features in the earliest texts that are atypical of their local alphabet (e.g. a non-Euboean-looking six-barred *sigma* at Methone, where a Euboean alphabet was used and would be expected to have a three- or four-barred *sigma*¹³⁷). In fact, the best explanation for such fluctuation at an early stage, followed by well-defined but diverse local alphabets in the Archaic period, is that the local alphabets crystallised over time. That is to say that, as writing became more visible and more linked with local social and political features and community display (e.g. when it began to be used for legal or other formal inscriptions, which are not attested before the later 7th century BC¹³⁸), the local alphabets acquired more standardised forms.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ E.g. Cook and Woodhead (1959). The pre-existing use of certain consonantal signs in Phoenician as *matres lectionis* (i.e. as ad hoc vowel signs) has sometimes been cited as potential evidence for polygenesis: see e.g. Luraghi (forthcoming).

¹³⁵ Communication of the alphabet across Greece was suggested recently by Wachter (forthcoming) to be a matter of weeks rather than years as is usually assumed.

¹³⁶ E.g. Johnston (2012).

¹³⁷ Janko (2015) 4.

¹³⁸ The earliest surviving example of such an inscription is the first Dreros legal code from Crete.

¹³⁹ See also the paper by Steele in Boyes and Steele (forthcoming).

The brief excursus on the Greek alphabet can help us to think about the development of the Cypriot Syllabic script – or rather we should say scripts, since there were two distinct variants known to us as the Paphian and Common Cypriot Syllabaries. As with the Greek alphabet, the early development of particular features of these two systems is not always easy to account for. Why, for example, in the case of different variants that are both attested in Cypro-Minoan, do we sometimes see the Paphian syllabary select one variant while the Common syllabary selects the other, as in the case of Paphian *to* τ and Common *to* F ? However, we have already seen that the divergent features of the Paphian and Common syllabaries were not completely fixed in some of the earliest inscriptions in the 8th to 7th centuries BC (for example, an inscription with a Paphian *o* but written in sinistroverse as seen in [Figure 2.16](#); see further [section 2.4](#) above¹⁴⁰). Over time, however, the Paphian and Common syllabaries became standardised, and it is undoubtedly no coincidence that this process coincided with greater visibility of the writing systems as they began to be used in public display for texts of political importance, including monumental ones on stone and ones deposited in communal spaces such as sanctuaries. Close parallels with the development of Greek local alphabets can be seen here, as social and political context has to be factored in to understand the standardisation or ‘crystallisation’ of Cyprus’ two variant syllabic writing systems in the middle of the 1st millennium BC.

Taking a broad chronological view, we can reconstruct developments in writing and literacy over time, and the contexts in which these developments were taking place are fundamental to the developments themselves. In the Cypro-Geometric period, although there were probably already different local political structures across the island, they had not yet begun to use communal display of writing as a social administrative tool. Instead, at this time we find inscriptions on smaller and more personal items, more likely to be linked with status display in a smaller-scale context. The types of inscriptions and inscribed objects attested before, through and after the Cypro-Geometric period may not allow us to make a precise diagnosis about the epigraphic classification of the script in which any of the Cypro-Geometric inscriptions is written, but they do give us considerable evidence for continuities in writing traditions over time. Not only was there no break in literacy in Cyprus in the Early Iron Age, as there was in contemporary Greece, but furthermore we can observe some specific trends in literacy that were maintained over an extraordinarily long period of time. Changes

¹⁴⁰ See also Duhoux (2012) 86–7.

in social habits, political structure and language use did take place but they did not cause ruptures in literacy. In fact, the considerable continuities that can be observed in the use of writing across the island and over the course of 1,000 years or more suggest quite the opposite: groups of people speaking different languages, and developing new cultural traits and political situations, must have been in close contact with each other in order to maintain and develop these long-term traditions. The appearance of the Greek language in the *Op^heltau* inscription, found on an obelos from a tomb that appears in every way to belong to the distinctly Cypriot cultural sphere of its day, could be seen to epitomise such contact and interrelations in the early part of the Cypro-Geometric period.¹⁴¹

The social situation of Geometric Cyprus, and the degree of contact between population groups that seems to transcend any presumed political independence of different areas of the island, must also be seen as important to our understanding of the development of writing systems. Since we have so few inscriptions surviving from the Geometric period, we may assume that we are missing a large amount of epigraphic data that has not survived (or yet been found). However, we cannot assume that if we found more inscriptions from this period they would provide us with the mysterious ‘missing link’ bridging the gap between Cypro-Minoan and the newly created Cypriot Syllabary: this was the mistake made by the first editors of the *Op^heltau* inscription, who assumed they were dealing with just such a piece of evidence. Indeed it is not clear what we should expect to find if we did have more evidence for the epigraphic record of the period. If the Cypriot Syllabary was created by a deliberate reform, it is perhaps likely that it would have appeared at some point quite suddenly as a fully fledged entity than that it came to exist by incremental stages; we should not therefore expect to find a ‘missing link’. It is also quite likely that a newly reformed system would have co-existed with the older Cypro-Minoan system for a time, given that the new script could not have been created without some access to the old one from which it was adapted. In practice, this could have involved multiple different experimentations with newly adapted systems of which only one was eventually successful – although here we are in the realms of guesswork.

Even more important to the pattern of epigraphic evidence for the beginnings of the new script is the political background to its creation. There is no evidence at all to suggest that the Cypriot Syllabary was created by any political regime or under direct or centralised administrative

¹⁴¹ See Steele (2016b).

pressure. Its earliest certain surviving examples (Figures 2.10–2.16 above) are short inscriptions on pots and other items, and are scattered across the Mediterranean as well as appearing on Cyprus. It is not until the 7th century BC that royal inscriptions start to appear, and at the beginning they are not monumental or administrative in type but rather mark the ownership of objects, most famously in the gold bracelets of Eteandros found at Kourion.¹⁴² When the Cypriot Syllabary is first attested, it is marked by some innovations that set it apart from Cypro-Minoan, but as pointed out above its formal features are not fully developed, with the Paphian and Common variants of the new script not yet fully distinguished. It is only under later administrative pressure, as the variants of the Cypriot Syllabary became more strongly associated with political entities, that these formal features became fixed and adhered to. The decentralised power structures of Geometric Cyprus and the developing contexts of literacy made a long-lasting mark on Cypriot writing, and their legacy was the longevity and sustained efficacy of the Cypriot Syllabic script, which was to last for hundreds of years during the 1st millennium BC.

¹⁴² Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Kourion 1.

3 | ‘Understanding’ Undeciphered Scripts and Unidentified Languages

Anthropologists of today and yesterday, owing to lack of interest in history, have not in this matter asked themselves some important questions ... What mnemonics are employed as points of reference in tradition – features of landscape (history is often attached to places rather than peoples ...); features of the social structure (genealogies, age-sets, royal successions); and artifacts (heirlooms)?¹

3.1 Inscriptions as Artefacts

The previous two chapters will have alerted the reader to a rather significant problem in the historical study of Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age Cyprus: although a number of documents written in this period have survived, we cannot read the vast majority of them. The Cypro-Minoan inscriptions are written in one or more writing systems that remain mostly undeciphered. Matters improve when we move from the Bronze Age into the Geometric period: Phoenician inscriptions begin to appear from the 9th century BC, and, following a single early Cypro-Geometric example (the *Opheltau* obelos, discussed in [Chapter 2](#)), Greek inscriptions begin to appear in force from the 8th century BC onwards, now written in what we label as the Cypriot Syllabary rather than Cypro-Minoan. The Cypriot Syllabary is deciphered to the extent that we can understand the Greek texts well. However, it is not the case that all Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions can be read: many are Greek, but many others are too short or damaged or obscure to tell and, most importantly, a considerable number cannot be read because they are written in one or more languages that we do not understand (some of which are usually classed as ‘Eteocypriot’).

The aim of this chapter is to try to look past the linguistic limitations of the evidence and to work constructively with those inscriptions of Late Bronze Age and Iron Age Cyprus whose exact content we cannot access. After all, there is more to a written document than its basic linguistic content: we can discern a great deal about writing and its uses by considering

¹ Evans-Pritchard (1961) 52.

the objects that were being written on and their context, both in terms of immediate material and archaeological context, and in terms of the broader social, administrative or political setting in which they were employed. Some case studies will be offered to illustrate the sorts of investigations we can undertake and the sorts of results we can assemble when analysing these undeciphered and/or 'unreadable' texts.

Aside from efforts to decipher these texts, another way of trying to 'understand' them is to consider their context. It is in this sense that the quotation from Evans-Pritchard cited above becomes relevant to a chapter that is concerned with unreadable inscriptions: the point is a methodological one. Evans-Pritchard was questioning what features of society can form part of a social group's shared memories and traditions, a topic that was not as well treated at the time as it has been since, in both anthropological and archaeological scholarship. Choices about what languages to write and where to write them, as well as what writing system(s) to use, also feature in the construction of social traditions and must be studied within the broader local cultural context. These are aspects that are to some extent less well understood in the context of ancient writing systems (especially undeciphered ones), although there have been some productive case studies in recent years seeking to develop ideas on the materiality and context of the use of writing in the ancient world.² Even when we do not understand an inscription's content, we can often understand something about what it is *doing*:³ who was using the inscribed object, what they were using it for, how it was meant to be read or displayed, the role it played in its cultural context, and so on. Evidence for an inscribed object's use is also evidence for its place in society and the ways in which it was perceived by its users.

The rest of the chapter is divided into two sections. The first is dedicated to the Cypro-Minoan inscriptions of the Late Bronze Age and the problems of 'reading' them, and of reconstructing where these undeciphered texts fit into the wider socio-cultural sphere. In this case the context of the inscriptions helps us to fill in some gaps in our knowledge and to appreciate the role of literacy in Late Bronze Age Cyprus. The second section focuses on the non-Greek Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions of the 1st millennium BC (in particular the group labelled 'Eteocypriot'), which present a different set of problems from those presented by Cypro-Minoan. We can go further in

² Recent collected volumes on related themes include Baines, Bennet and Houston (2008) and Piquette and Whitehouse (2013).

³ To ask what inscriptions are 'doing' may put us in mind of discussions of agency in current archaeological thought. This issue is discussed in relation to ancient writing by various authors in Englehardt (2013).

‘reading’ these texts because they are written in a deciphered script, but because we know little about their underlying language(s), we cannot for the most part understand their content. Again social context can help us to fill in some gaps, which allows the significant corpus of non-Greek syllabic textual material to be considered more effectively alongside the better-understood Greek syllabic inscriptions of the same period.

3.2 Cypro-Minoan

3.2.1 ‘Reading’ Cypro-Minoan

We must begin by asking to what extent we are not able to read Cypro-Minoan inscriptions. For, as mentioned above, Cypro-Minoan is only mostly undeciphered: we can confidently ascertain the values of a small number of signs via comparative analysis with the related deciphered scripts Linear B and the Cypriot Syllabary, while the rest remain unknown (or only conjectured), meaning that we can at least begin to identify phonetic approximations of a small number of signs and sign sequences. The identification of some or all sign values is itself a kind of decipherment, but does not necessarily entail that we can understand the content of inscriptions or the language(s) in which they are written (a division that is all the more relevant to the case of Eteocypriot: see [section 3.3](#) below). This is a relatively optimistic view of the current state of knowledge, but does not go as far as some students of Cypro-Minoan who have attempted full decipherment (i.e. by trying to identify underlying language as well as sign values), some of whom have declared their success with a level of confidence that betrays the superficiality of their approach (and some of whom ‘deciphered’ Cypro-Minoan as a by-product of ‘deciphering’ other ancient artefacts such as the Phaistos Disk). Such ‘decipherments’ typically assign a linguistic affiliation to Cypro-Minoan, concluding that one or another language is represented by some or all of the existing texts, based on assumptions about underlying lexicology and morphology.⁴ This is not a book about such decipherment attempts, and I will only echo Yves Duhoux’s sentiment that ‘one final and frustrating problem with unconvincing decipherments is the length of time and printed space it takes to refute them.’⁵ To begin by assuming that we have some knowledge of the language(s) underlying Cypro-Minoan is to invert the logical process by

⁴ On attempted decipherments of Cypro-Minoan, and assumptions about linguistic affinities, see briefly Steele (2013) 12–15.

⁵ Duhoux (2000) 599.

which we may be able to understand these inscriptions more fully: a decipherment can only follow a process of analysis that is conducted without recourse to assumptions about recorded languages.

We can proceed better by beginning with a study of the corpus of written material that has survived from the Cypriot Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. At the time of writing, the number of known Cypro-Minoan inscriptions of more than one sign stands at 246. There is no single publication of all the inscriptions, but the majority of them appear in editions edited by Olivier and Ferrara, to which a number of more recently discovered texts must be added.⁶ The texts are very diverse in nature, spanning probably more than 500 years from the earliest to the latest (16th to 10th centuries BC; a significant number, however, are of uncertain date), and recorded on a wide range of object types and materials.⁷ They are also typically very short, with few inscriptions bearing as many as 20 signs and the majority significantly shorter than that. The few longer texts are the ones that offer the best potential for productive analysis, and it is also sometimes possible to compare sequences attested in shorter texts with each other or with some attested in longer texts.

⁶ Olivier (2007) presents 215 inscriptions (plus two uninscribed items). All these are listed in Ferrara (2012/13), along with 17 further inscriptions (plus some single-sign inscriptions not counted in the total here); also added as an addendum is the Tiryns clay ball published by Veters (2011), numbered as ##244. Two inscriptions on vessels found at Tiryns have been assigned numbers ##245 and ##246: Olivier (1988) 255–8 and Davis, Maran and Wirghová (2014). Seven inscriptions, including one from Ugarit, are published by Valério (2014), who also provides a concordance of all the inscriptions so far mentioned along with their numbers, following Olivier's assignment of numbers prefixed with ## to each inscription as well as an abbreviated descriptive label (pp. 123–6). An inscription on a bronze bowl from Palaepaphos has also been added more recently, with the number ##254: Egetmeyer (2016). Some further inscriptions have yet to be assigned an official absolute number in the list, although some have been assigned descriptive labels: one from Erimi-Kafkalla by Hirschfeld and Smith (2012); most significantly, two clay tablets (i.e. relatively long inscriptions) found at Pyla-Kokkinokremos mentioned in Karageorghis and Kanta (2012) 110–11, to be published by Athanasia Kanta and Massimo Perna. This brings the total to 246.

Some further possible Cypro-Minoan inscriptions can also be mentioned: one from Hala Sultan Tekke mentioned by Fischer (2011) 79; one from Karpasia, Galinoporni mentioned in Bartelheim et al. (2008) 173; two from Sardinia mentioned in Zucca (2012) 49–52 and 60–8 and (2013), probably to be considered as doubtful examples.

Single-sign 'texts' also are not counted in the total number here, primarily because they are extremely difficult to classify alongside other inscriptions and do not always conform to known signs of the Cypro-Minoan repertoire. However, single-sign inscriptions emphatically do merit study as a reflex of writing and literacy: see for example Hirschfeld (1992), (2001), (2002) on the tradition of marking pots with single signs.

⁷ See Steele (2012).

The Cypro-Minoan inscriptions lack some of the advantages associated with other ancient scripts that have been deciphered in the modern period. There is as yet no bilingual or multilingual inscription setting the Cypro-Minoan script alongside a well-known, deciphered script; for the later period on Cyprus, the existence of a bilingual text had been an advantage allowing the decipherment of the Cypriot Syllabary of the 1st millennium (similar to the more famous decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics based on analysis of the trilingual Rosetta Stone). The number of surviving Cypro-Minoan texts, and the number of individual attested signs within those texts, is also relatively very small, compared with writing systems deciphered without the aid of a bilingual, such as Linear B (some 6,000 inscriptions). A further advantage in the case of Linear B was the existence in that script system of an ideographic/logographic component, i.e. the presence of signs representing whole words or concepts, some of which were pictographically very transparent (e.g. famously the horse ideogram EQU ) making the subject of some documents obvious even before decipherment. Such signs seem to be absent from Cypro-Minoan, or at least we can say that up to now no comprehensive ideographic system comparable with that attested in Linear A and B appears to play a role in the surviving Cypro-Minoan inscriptions. In the absence of such advantages, a decipherment of Cypro-Minoan currently seems an unlikely prospect.

This leaves open the question of how we can proceed with analysing the Cypro-Minoan texts. As pointed out recently for example by Valério,⁸ the two primary steps we can take towards decipherment in the current state of knowledge involve firstly internal, and secondly comparative, analysis of the sign repertoire of the surviving inscriptions. Internal analysis refers especially to the study of graphic and palaeographic variation in order to identify each individual sign present in the overall signary, as well as to the observation of patterns in sign sequences that may reveal underlying structural and linguistic features. The signs may then be compared with those attested in related writing systems, and it is here advantageous that Cypro-Minoan is related to three well-attested scripts (Linear A, Linear B and the Cypriot Syllabary of the 1st millennium), two of which are deciphered (Linear B and the Cypriot Syllabary). These allow us to understand better the structure of the Cypro-Minoan writing system and open up the question of how many sign values can be identified and with what degree of certainty. As mentioned above, an important corollary to such processes is to analyse the context of inscriptions and to try to glean as

⁸ Valério (2017).

much information as possible about the situation in which the documents and the writing system were being used, and how and by whom. Although this could be seen as a separate concern and is often considered separately, there are important links between script use and script structure that make such an investigation potentially very illuminating.⁹

3.2.2 Analysing Cypro-Minoan Signs

Despite the diversity of the Cypro-Minoan inscriptions, scholars in the 20th and 21st centuries have via successive studies attempted to draw up a list of signs attested in Cypro-Minoan. This is a more difficult task than it at first sounds because it requires the analyst to make assumptions about what makes one sign different from another one, which may seem obvious in the case of some pairs and less so in the case of others: for example, while it is obviously correct that sign 023  and sign 102  are different from each other, it is more difficult to determine whether sign 023  is different from sign 024  or whether sign 102  is different from sign 110 .¹⁰ From looking at the Cypro-Minoan inscriptions alone, the only way of trying to verify that these are different signs (as opposed to variants of the same sign) is to look for consistency in the way in which the signs were drawn and, when they appear together in the same text, to look for some indication that care was taken to distinguish one from the other. A comparative perspective, however, allows further elucidation: all the above signs are ones that have convincing parallels in the later deciphered Cypriot Syllabic script as *ti* , *le*  (Paphian Cypriot Syllabary only), *a*  and *ku* , where the latter two show a typical feature of a development of H-like shapes to X-like shapes ('H > X reduction'). Since the later script must have been developed directly from Cypro-Minoan (although the question of how and when remains open; see further [Chapter 2](#)), this makes it very likely that each of these shapes comprised a different sign within the Cypro-Minoan repertoire.

Following initial studies in the early 20th century,¹¹ it was especially the work of John Daniel on palaeographic features that paved the way for our modern understanding of the list of attested signs in Cypro-Minoan.¹² He

⁹ Steele (2016a).

¹⁰ The numbers assigned to each sign here follow the numbering of Olivier (2007), i.e. one of the recent attempts to draw up an exhaustive list of attested signs. Inevitably the numbers are assigned from a modern perspective, and scholars differ in their assumptions about the total number and list of signs.

¹¹ E.g. Evans (1909) 68–77, (1935), Markides (1916), Casson (1937), Persson (1937).

¹² Daniel (1941).

showed the great importance of being attentive not only to the shape of each sign, but also to the medium and object type on which it was recorded, since such features can themselves have a significant effect on the appearance of signs. The challenge of drawing up a Cypro-Minoan signary was taken up by subsequent scholars, most notably Émilie Masson, who published new inscriptions, discussed further epigraphic and palaeographic factors, and drew up sign tables in a number of successive publications.¹³ Masson's work provided a solid foundation for more recent studies, but also introduced some elements to research on Cypro-Minoan that have remained controversial up to this day, most notably the separation of the Cypro-Minoan inscriptions into four different groups, each hypothesised to represent a separate script with a different repertoire of signs. She labelled them CM1 (i.e. all inscriptions that do not fall into the other groups), CM2 (a small group of long inscribed tablets from Enkomi), CM3 (all the Cypro-Minoan epigraphic material from Ugarit and its environs) and 'Archaic' (four inscriptions that she assumed to be relatively early and to show an earlier form of script). In some ways this can be seen as a reversal of Daniel's methodology: instead of using variation in medium, document type and chronological/geographical distribution to understand variation in sign shape within a single body of texts, Masson used such variations to divide up the whole corpus into smaller sub-corpora, looking for internal consistency within the smaller groups. Masson's groupings were followed by Olivier in his 'holistic edition' of the Cypro-Minoan inscriptions, although not without criticism.¹⁴

Recent studies have questioned the validity of Masson's categories. Breaking down the corpus of Cypro-Minoan inscriptions into coherent sub-corpora can certainly aid us in understanding those groups of texts as objects and as documents, and it is furthermore helpful to observe Cypro-Minoan writing within sets of coherent contexts.¹⁵ For example, the group of Cypro-Minoan inscribed clay balls (discussed in detail in [section 3.2.3](#) below) displays considerable coherence in terms of palaeographical style, and the majority are also closely unified in chronological and geographical provenance. Although they do not constitute a single one of Masson's groups (falling within her category of CM1 alongside other inscriptions),

¹³ E.g. É. Masson (1970), (1971a), (1971b), (1972), (1974), (1979), (1985), (1986), (1987). Other scholars tackling similar problems include Meriggi (1956), (1972b), Nahm (1981) and Hiller (1985).

¹⁴ Olivier (2007) where Masson's 'Archaic' category is replaced by a category labelled 'CM0', consisting of just one of the early inscriptions (##001); this text is discussed in detail in [Chapter 1](#).

¹⁵ See Steele (2013) 35–47.

they merit separate study; however, this should not be to the exclusion of integrated study alongside other Cypro-Minoan inscriptions, which is especially relevant in the case of the clay balls since some of them record sequences of signs that can be found repeated not only among the ball inscriptions but also in other Cypro-Minoan texts.¹⁶ Nevertheless, in the case of some of the longer inscriptions it may be instructive to compare isolated groups of inscriptions with each other. A comparison of the Enkomi tablets bearing long inscriptions (##207–9, often categorised as 'CM2', more than 1,300 syllabic signs in total¹⁷) with an inscribed clay cylinder from the same site (##097, classed by Masson as CM1, 203 syllabic signs of which eight are too damaged to identify) reveals that at least a significant proportion of the signs attested in the shorter cylinder inscriptions do not appear in the much longer tablets. Given that statistically we should expect the long tablet inscriptions to contain most of the signs of the signary in which they are written at least once (i.e. signs attested in the cylinder are far less likely to be missing from the tablets by chance), this suggests that they are written in different scripts with different repertoires of signs.¹⁸

The validity of Masson's groups is more questionable when it comes to establishing the repertoire of Cypro-Minoan signs. For Masson, each of her groups had a separate signary: she saw them as different scripts with a different number and set of signs in each one. Despite reanalysing some of the individual signs and making some deletions and mergers of signs in Masson's signaries, Olivier maintained her divisions and so made separate tables of signs for each of CM0, CM1, CM2 and CM3 (Table 3.1).¹⁹ Ferrara has taken a different approach, using contextual and palaeographical analysis to reassess the corpus of inscriptions, and arguing, albeit gently, for a view of Cypro-Minoan as one script whose internal variations are due mainly to palaeographic factors, and suggesting a tentative reduced signary of this single script.²⁰ More recently Valério, following a detailed palaeographic study of sign shapes and variation, has suggested merging

¹⁶ For a list see Ferrara (2015) 110.

¹⁷ The number of supposedly legible signs in these inscriptions varies from author to author, based on differing attitudes to the legibility of signs in the more damaged portions of the tablets.

¹⁸ See Steele (2014a): out of 39 different signs attested in the shorter text of the cylinder, at least a quarter do not appear at all in the tablets. Note however that counting the signs depends on an assumption that we have categorised each one correctly in the first place, and that reassessing the overall repertoire of Cypro-Minoan signs (as some scholars have; see below) affects our impression of the exact proportion of signs in the cylinder not attested in the CM2 tablets.

¹⁹ For some positivist arguments related to the possible attestation of multiple writing systems, see Steele (2014a) on CM2 and Duhoux (2017) on CM3.

²⁰ Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 (suggested signary p. 255).

Table 3.1 Cypro-Minoan signs listed with sub-corpora, after Olivier (2007) 413.

	CM 1	CM 2	'CM 3'		CM 1	CM 2	'CM 3'		CM 1	CM 2	'CM 3'
001	I	I	I	040	...	...	⊖	079	...	𐀓	...
002	𐀀	...	𐀁	041	𐀂	...	...	080	...	𐀔	...
004	𐀃	𐀃	𐀃	044	𐀄	𐀄	𐀄	081	𐀕	𐀕	...
005	+	+	+	046	𐀆	...	...	082	𐀖	𐀖	𐀖
006	𐀇	𐀇	𐀇	047	...	𐀈	...	083	𐀗	...	...
007	𐀉	...	𐀉	049	...	𐀊	...	084	𐀘	...	...
008	𐀋	𐀋	𐀋	050	𐀌	...	𐀌	085	𐀙	...	...
009	𐀍	𐀍	𐀍	051	...	𐀎	𐀎	086	𐀚	...	...
010	...	𐀏	...	052	...	!!	...	087	𐀛	𐀛	𐀛
011	𐀑	𐀑	𐀑	053	𐀒	...	𐀒	088	𐀜	...	...
012	𐀓	𐀓	...	054	...	!!	...	089	...	𐀞	...
012b	𐀔	...	...	055	𐀕	...	𐀕	090	...	𐀞	...
013	𐀖	𐀖	𐀖	056	𐀗	𐀗	𐀗	091	𐀘	𐀘	𐀘
015	𐀙	...	...	058	...	...	𐀚	092	𐀛	𐀛	𐀛
017	𐀜	𐀜	...	059	𐀝	𐀝	...	094	...	...	𐀟
019	𐀞	...	𐀞	060	...	𐀟	...	095	𐀠	𐀠	𐀠
021	𐀡	𐀡	𐀡	061	𐀢	𐀢	...	096	𐀣	𐀣	𐀣
023	𐀤	𐀤	𐀤	063	𐀥	...	...	097	𐀦	𐀦	𐀦
024	𐀧	𐀧	...	062	...	𐀨	...	098	...	...	𐀩
025	𐀪	𐀪	𐀪	064	𐀫	𐀫	...	099	𐀬	...	𐀬
026	𐀭	...	...	066	...	𐀮	...	100	...	...	𐀯
027	𐀰	𐀰	𐀰	067	𐀱	...	...	101	𐀲	...	...
028	𐀳	𐀳	𐀳	068	𐀴	𐀴	...	102	𐀵	𐀵	𐀵
029	...	𐀶	...	069	𐀷	𐀷	𐀷	103	𐀸	...	𐀸
030	𐀹	𐀹	...	070	𐀺	𐀺	𐀺	104	𐀻	𐀻	𐀻
033	𐀼	𐀼	...	071	...	...	𐀽	105	...	...	𐀾
034	𐀿	...	...	072	𐀿	𐀿	...	107	𐀿	𐀿	...
035	𐁀	𐁀	𐁀	073	𐁁	...	𐁁	108	𐁂	...	...
036	𐁃	𐁃	𐁃	074	...	𐁄	𐁄	109	𐁅	...	...
037	𐁆	𐁆	𐁆	075	𐁇	𐁇	𐁇	110	𐁈	𐁈	𐁈
038	𐁉	𐁉	𐁉	076	...	𐁊	...	112	𐁋	...	...
039	𐁌	...	...	078	...	𐁍	...	114	𐁎	...	...

some particular Cypro-Minoan signs of the traditional repertoire and cautiously put forward a tentative reduced signary of between 57 and 70 separate signs on this basis.²¹

²¹ Valério (2016) 73–165 and tables 2.95–8.

With further finds and new developments in the analysis of the Cypro-Minoan inscriptions, our view of the repertoire of signs is likely to change over the coming years. The numeration given by Olivier (see [Table 3.1](#)) is followed in this book and is widely accepted as a basis for classifying individual signs. However, it is important to remember that further study may lead to some changes, for example re-numeration, deletions and mergers (e.g. inclusion of two different shapes under the same number if they are thought to be variants of the same sign rather than separate signs). Another problem with presenting the signs in a grid such as the one above is that it flattens the palaeographic variation attested in the Cypro-Minoan corpus by presenting each sign in a 'normalised' version. For a well-attested script, like the related Linear B, presenting a grid of signs in such a way is far less problematic because we have so much more palaeographic data and so a much better idea of what a normalised version of each sign might look like – and all the more so considering the very consistent contexts in which the signs are recorded, almost all on clay documents that existed within a very unified tradition of administration and scribal training. With so much less information at our disposal for the Cypro-Minoan inscriptions, which are attested in more variegated contexts, it is much more difficult to hypothesise about what the 'perfect' or 'normal' version of a sign might have been in the minds of those writing. The very palaeographic and epigraphic variation that has resulted in theories about the existence of several different writing systems must itself be a symptom of the contexts of writing in the Cypriot Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages, which were certainly less centralised and controlled than writing in, for example, Mycenaean Greece.²² While it is useful to present the signary in grid-form as a reference, close study of palaeographic variations is essential in order to develop our understanding of the repertoire of signs further.

Given the uncertainties associated with the repertoire of signs and the multiple viewpoints of different scholars on the ways in which we should categorise them, it may seem premature to attempt to identify linguistic features in the documents. However, there is some potential for discoveries in this area provided that we remain mindful of the limitations of the data. For example, some sign sequences are found more than once, sometimes with one or two signs differing: the pair 082-095-088 (attested in a clay ball ##034 and an ivory pipe found at Kition ##161) and 082-095-088-023 (attested in the Enkomi cylinder ##097) look like the same word, in one case with a different ending; the pair 102-073-004-097 (attested in two clay

²² Steele (2017).

balls ##016 and ##048 and on a vase ##109) and 102-073-004-097-023 (attested on an ivory plaque from Kition ##163) seem to show this same ‘ending’ in -023 again.²³ To this we may also add that sign 023  (which as noted above is undoubtedly related to the Cypriot Syllabic and also the Linear B signs representing the syllable *ti*) is very frequent in word-final position, which might point towards it acting as some sort of ‘ending’ in other words as well. A few more fluctuations of similar type can be found in words attested in the corpus and it is very likely that they reflect linguistic patterns, probably of a morphological nature.²⁴ The best attested case, the -023 ending, could also tantalisingly point towards a link with the later Eteocypriot language attested during the 1st millennium BC, in which a morphological ending -*o-ti* can be observed with both Eteocypriot words and Greek names in Eteocypriot inscriptions (see [section 3.3](#) below).²⁵

Table 3.2 The most easily confirmed correspondences between Linear A and B, Cypro-Minoan and Cypriot Syllabic signs.

Linear A (+ value of related Linear B sign)	Cypro-Minoan	Cypriot Syllabary (+ value)
 (a)		 (a)
 (da)		 (ta)
 (i)		 (i)
 (na)		 (na)
 (pa)		 (pa)
 (po)	 ?	 (po)
 (ro/lo)		 (lo)
 (sa)		 (sa)
 (se)		 (se)
 (ti)		 (ti)
 (to)		 (to)

²³ A sequence 102-073-004-097-110-073 is also attested in another clay ball ##024, and appears related.
²⁴ See Steele (2013) 66–71.
²⁵ Suggested already by É. Masson (1971a) 25–6, Duhoux (2009b).

Valério’s attempts to assign values to a larger proportion of the Cypro-Minoan repertoire has furthermore revealed a number of sequences in which sign 023 follows a confirmed or hypothesised ‘o’ vowel at the end of a word, again suggesting a link with the attested Eteocypriot ending (see also [section 3.3.2](#) below).²⁶

As can be seen from the discussion in the previous paragraph, the identification of as many sign values as possible is desirable if we are to try to interpret the features and patterns observable in the Cypro-Minoan corpus. Again authors differ in their approach to this problem. At a minimum we can identify 10 or 11 signs in Cypro-Minoan whose cognates are clear in the related scripts Linear A, Linear B and the 1st-millennium Cypriot Syllabary ([Table 3.2](#)), and these values are widely agreed on in



Figure 3.1 Clay tablet ##215 from Ugarit: front.

²⁶ Valério (2016) 397–401.

scholarship.²⁷ É. Masson proposed a series of sign values for a much larger proportion of the signs, based in part on assumptions about developments from Linear A to Cypro-Minoan,²⁸ but many of her views have not met with widespread acceptance. Valério more recently has used a comparative method both to refine our view of the repertoire of Cypro-Minoan signs through greater attention to palaeographic variation in Linear A and the Cypriot Syllabary, and to give a firmer basis on which to draw conclusions about the possible values of each sign.²⁹

One of the clay tablets from Ugarit has proved an interesting test case in the hypothetical assignation of sound values to Cypro-Minoan signs: ##215 (Figures 3.1 and 3.2). It is one of four Cypro-Minoan clay tablets found at Ugarit, whose epigraphic record is dominated by cuneiform-inscribed tablets written in Ugaritic, Akkadian and sometimes other languages such as Hurrian. Ugaritic was written in a specially derived alphabetic form of



Figure 3.2 Clay tablet ##215 from Ugarit: back and side.

²⁷ See Steele (2013) 50–60 and Steele and Meißner (2017) 97–99.

²⁸ E.g. É. Masson (1987).

²⁹ A possible reconstruction of values for 60 signs, marked with differing degrees of certainty in each case, is presented in Valério (2016): e.g. p. 301, table 3.126.

cuneiform, while Akkadian and Hurrian were usually written in syllabic cuneiform, but there was some experimentation with writing different languages in different writing systems. As an object, therefore, #215 fits in well with its surroundings, and while the choice to write Cypro-Minoan in such a text is evidently unusual, it is testament to the unusually experimental and dynamic epigraphic atmosphere in which it was created. Although written on a document type that was usually used locally for cuneiform, whose signs were impressed with a wedge-shaped implement, this text was written with a rounded stylus, again showing an innovative approach to its inscription. The building in which it was found, the House of Rap'anu, was one with a particularly eclectic collection of documents that also contained texts in Akkadian, Sumerian, Hurrian and Egyptian, of which some Akkadian royal correspondence with external powers deserves particular mention because it included letters involving Alashiya (identified as a Late Bronze Age name for Cyprus). The creation of the Cypro-Minoan tablet has to be understood within this framework of epigraphic variety and external contacts, although it is difficult to reconstruct the exact circumstances in which it might have been written or who may have written it – a local Ugaritan or a visiting or resident Cypriot in Ugarit?

One of the reasons why #215 has attracted considerable attention is a set of features that makes it tempting to reconstruct the structure of the text. The lines of text are of uneven length, some long and occupying the whole line (even extending round the edge in some cases, a practice common in cuneiform documents) and others quite short. This gives it the appearance of a list rather than a continuous text. An otherwise unknown sign  furthermore appears at the end of lines and may be assumed to mark individual entries.³⁰ Going by comparisons with similar-looking cuneiform documents (which often contain personal names and extra information such as patronyms or ethnic designations), the tablet has been suggested to be a list of names. It is not only the function of the text that has attracted attention, however, but also its exact content, and a repeated sequence of two signs that appears in many of its lines has become a focus of interpretation:   (usually numbered as Cypro-Minoan signs 051-028). Émilie Masson, for example, proposed that this sequence should be interpreted as the Ugaritic word for 'son' (*bn*), reading it as *bi-nu* on this basis, and incorporating this assumption into a reading of the whole text with proposed name sequences.³¹ Several other scholars have tried similar

³⁰ First suggested by O. Masson (1969).

³¹ É. Masson (1973b) and (1974) 30–5.

approaches to understanding the tablet,³² and most recently Valério has approached the problem from a different angle via a comparative analysis of sign shapes and proposes to read the sequence   as *pr²-lu*.³³ This may still plausibly be interpreted as the Ugaritic word for ‘son’ provided that we see the use of an l-sign as a strategy to represent /nu/ in writing, which could follow from the lack of a *nu* sign in Cypro-Minoan (note that Linear A/B *nu*  and Cypriot Syllabic *nu*  do not appear to be related to each other). Interpretations of other particular words and names in the tablet have also been proposed by different scholars including those cited here, again based on reconstructions of Cypro-Minoan sign values and varying in the degree to which they have been accepted by others working in the field. Ferrara, on the other hand, has avoided making assumptions about the language of the text and has rightly criticised some of the assumptions in É. Masson’s analysis of its linguistic features, preferring to remain agnostic and seeing the inscription as potentially written in a Cypriot language rather than one local to Ugarit.³⁴

The reading and interpretation of tablet ##215 are not assured, but a convincing argument can be made that it is a list of names that employs an Ugaritic way of expressing patronymics (name + *bn* + name). Valério goes further and highlights what looks like a prevalence of endings in *-i* in final words of a string (formulae of either word +   + word, or just word + word), which could indicate the use of the Ugaritic genitive in the second element of these formulae.³⁵ In this case, we would be dealing with not just a series of names using Ugaritic onomastic conventions, but specifically an Ugaritic language text, written in Cypro-Minoan script. To what extent this seems likely or plausible is obviously a matter of judgement, but it should not surprise us that, at a site where there was documented experimentation with different combinations of script and language, someone just might have written down some Ugaritic text in a Cypriot writing system. Whatever the language and whoever wrote the inscription, the tablet is testament to a mixture of Cypriot and Ugaritan influences. Previous work on this particular tablet is too lengthy to reproduce here in more detail, but I hope it is already obvious from this brief overview of the evidence that it matters whether we think we know what the values of individual Cypro-Minoan signs were – and how we proceed from sign values to linguistic interpretation.

³² E.g. Meriggi (1972a), Saporetti (1976), Nahm (1981).

³³ Valério (2016) 364–7 (and see his full discussion of the inscription at 346–96).

³⁴ Ferrara (2012/13) vol. I 258–60 and 139–41.

³⁵ Valério (2016) 395.



Figure 3.3 Clay ball from Enkomi.

3.2.3 Case Study: Cypro-Minoan Clay Balls³⁶

One of the most distinctively Cypriot inscription types of the Late Bronze Age was the clay ball, a small spherical piece of clay with an inscription running around it (Figure 3.1). At Enkomi, 81 examples have been found, as well as two more from Kition and two from Hala Sultan Tekke. Another one has more recently been found outside of Cyprus, at Tiryns in the Greek Argolid. From surviving evidence Enkomi appears to have been a, or perhaps the, predominant producer of these items on Cyprus. The earliest dated examples appear in the 14th century BC, and the last one probably belongs to the 11th, making this an inscription type of particular longevity, although a considerable proportion of the surviving objects cannot be dated. Clay balls are the most numerous class of inscription in the Cypro-Minoan corpus and account for approximately a third of surviving Late Bronze Age Cypriot documents. The considerable unity of this group in terms of object type and material, as well as palaeographical style, lends great potential for analysis of the clay balls both as inscriptions and as objects.

The question of what the clay balls were used for has never been answered satisfactorily. Given that they are almost completely exclusive to Cyprus and without parallel in the ancient Mediterranean and Near East, it is difficult to find direct evidence for their usage and purpose: only two similar objects found at Ugarit, and inscribed in cuneiform, may help as external evidence although they are of limited interpretive value as we will see.

³⁶ A preview of this section appeared in the *British Academy Review*: Steele (2014c).

The balls are typically about 1.8–2.0 cm in diameter, and roughly spherical in shape. They were formed in wet clay probably by rolling them in the hand, and the inscriptions were applied before the clay had fully dried. The inscriber would have had to hold the ball between the fingers and thumb of one hand, often leaving fingerprints or impressions in the clay, and applied the written signs by using some sort of pointed stylus in the other. Sometimes the inscriptions are long enough to continue around most of the ball, creating a risk of squashing some signs with the fingers while turning the ball to finish the inscription. There have even survived some uninscribed examples, some perhaps discarded because they were too small or large or too uneven in shape. Despite the awkwardness of the manufacture and inscription process, the balls seem to have remained a popular inscription type. Strikingly, in one building at Enkomi, the monumental building referred to as the ‘fortress building’, clay balls are found in layers dated both to before and to after a major spatial reorganisation of the building in the later 13th century BC; this suggests that the object and inscription type was maintained despite administrative upheaval that must have led to the building’s reorganisation.

One way of trying to ‘understand’ these inscribed objects is to analyse them as texts by looking at the patterns of inscription attested. The arrangement of the inscription on each ball varies. Some have a single sequence of between two and eight signs (single sequence: c.37%). A smaller number have two sequences of signs, divided by a small line or ‘word divider’ (sequence + sequence: c.17%). The greater proportion of the balls,



Figure 3.4 Clay ball from Enkomi, showing a word divider at the end of a sequence followed by a single sign.

however, have a distinctive pattern: a sequence of a few signs followed by a word divider, and after the divider a single sign only, e.g. 041-028-021 | 055 in standard transcription (sequence + 1: c.45%): see Figure 3.2.³⁷ There is also a single clay ball inscription that consists only of two signs separated from each other by a word divider, 102  and 006 , without any longer sequence (clay ball ##061) (1+1: <1%). The function of these single signs has attracted the most attention in attempts to interpret the clay ball inscriptions, with the concept of logography (i.e. a system of signs used to represent not syllables as they are usually used, but whole words or concepts) frequently called upon to explain them.

It is striking that in the 'sequence + 1' type texts, which account for just under half of all the clay ball inscriptions, there is considerable variation in the isolated sign that follows the word divider. There are 10 Cypro-Minoan signs that appear only once in this position, and 12 that appear between two and four times; most frequent are 006 , 025  and 112  with four examples each. All the signs are ones that can appear in sequences of signs, and so we can exclude the possibility that any of them functions purely as a logogram, such as we find with some signs for example in Linear A and B (where a considerable proportion of ideograms/logograms have only their ideographic/logographic value, although some do double up as syllabograms). There is no doubt that these are syllabic signs from the normal repertoire of Cypro-Minoan, and the only feature that marks their usage out as in some way special in these cases is that they are isolated from any other signs or sequences by the word divider.

The clay balls are not the only inscriptions that make use of deliberately isolated signs: there are some longer inscriptions in which a single sign is sometimes isolated from longer sequences, for example in some metal objects from Enkomi (##183, a bronze bowl) and Myrtou (##184, a stand ring). This feature may also be present in an ivory pipe from Kition with an inscription incorporated into its decoration (##161) and possibly also several times in the inscription on a clay cylinder originating from Enkomi (##097), one of the longest surviving texts in Cypro-Minoan. In the latter, however, the identification of isolated signs depends on our interpretation of a particular sign found in that inscription alone,  (transliterated as &), which has been assumed to act as a divider or connective particle.³⁸ Another set of inscriptions that can be added here is the group of texts consisting of

³⁷ See the summary and table in Ferrara (2015) 108–9.

³⁸ See É. Masson (1971b) and Olivier (2007) 123. The sign looks not unlike one common form of sign 012 , which may or may not be significant: see Steele (2013) 44–5.

‘1+1’ type inscriptions, containing just two signs separated from each other by a word divider, which were discussed in more detail (with reference to their apparent later continuations in the 1st millennium BC) in [Chapter 2](#) ([section 2.5](#)). Again with some allusion to possible logography, some inscriptions of this last group have been suggested to record Cypriot ‘branding’ of copper in their appearances on ingots.³⁹

One of the problems with suggesting that the isolated signs belong to a logographic system, as pointed out by Ferrara, is the variety of different signs used in this way and their appearance on different types of objects, which according to her ‘points to the possibility (but this is obviously tentative) that each isolated sign represented a different commodity produced on Cyprus’.⁴⁰ However, we can take a step backwards from such a conclusion and question what we might mean by ‘logogram’ in the case of these inscriptions. The problematic aspect is the assumed link between logography and the recording of commodities, which might seem to be inextricably connected if we look towards contemporary and near-contemporary Aegean parallels, particularly in Linear A and B, but cannot be shown to have any such relationship in Late Bronze Age Cyprus. It seems better to begin without recourse to such parallels and without any assumption that either (a) this is a logographic *system*, or (b) if these are logograms they must represent commodities or be economic in character.

We should remember at this point that only some 45% of the clay balls have inscriptions that include an isolated sign (i.e. ‘sequence + 1’, or in one case ‘1+1’). The rest of the balls have either one or two sequences of signs. What do these sequences represent? The two cuneiform-inscribed clay balls found at Ugarit may help us to understand the Cypriot examples: although the function of these objects is similarly mysterious, they are written in deciphered script(s). One was found in a funerary context and is inscribed with three letters in Ugaritic cuneiform, *šmn*, which could represent the word for ‘oil’ but should more probably to be interpreted as a man’s name that is attested elsewhere in several Ugaritic tablets.⁴¹ The other was found in a residential area and either records a sequence *pg pg* in Ugaritic (which could be linked with an attested man’s name, *pgn*) or a repeated Akkadian logogram *giš giš* (meaning ‘wood’). Again the interpretation of the anthroponym must be preferred, not least because there would be no obvious reason to record a logogram twice in succession (especially in a

³⁹ Ferrara and Bell (2016).

⁴⁰ Ferrara (2015) 111.

⁴¹ Published in Dalix (2008).

script with a well-developed numerical system); furthermore, an inscription consisting of only a logogram would presumably have to act as a label for an external referent, and it is very difficult to imagine these small, spherical objects acting usefully as labels.⁴² If the Ugaritan examples represent names, which is very likely for the first example if more difficult to demonstrate for the second, then this could be taken to point towards the sequences in the Cypriot balls also representing names. It would in any case be tempting to hypothesise the existence of names in the clay ball inscriptions on the more tenuous basis that short inscriptions on small objects are typologically likely to contain names, which had already led Émilie Masson to a similar conclusion when she identified the objects as some sort of 'identity card' carried by individuals, perhaps in an industrial context.⁴³

If the clay balls record names, then what would be the function of the isolated sign in some of the inscriptions? This should lead us away from the assumptions previously mentioned that the isolated signs could represent commodities. If they did represent commodities, then why would some of the individuals not have any commodity recorded next to their names? Furthermore, it seems very unlikely that such a wide variety of commodities would be recorded in such inscriptions, with so few repetitions. Here another piece of evidence may be instructive. Sometimes sequences found in the Enkomi clay balls appear on more than one ball, and there is even a sequence that appears both at Enkomi and at Hala Sultan Tekke, 064-005-024: at Enkomi it appears once in a 'sequence + 1' inscription followed by sign 046 (ball ##076) and once in a 'sequence + sequence' inscription followed by 081-008-009-072 (ball ##070), while at Hala Sultan Tekke it appears again in a 'sequence + 1' inscription followed by sign 073 (ball ##089). In another case at Enkomi we again find a sequence, 041-028-021, in two different balls with a different single sign after the word divider in each case: 055 in one (ball ##004) and 019 in the other (ball ##018). If the sequence records a name, then we face the possibility that repeated sequences in different balls record the same individual; if this is the case, then in the cases of 064-005-024 and 041-028-021 it could be that they are recorded for some reason in different contexts. However, a better explanation might be that these are instances of two or three different

⁴² See further the discussion in Ferrara (2015) 112–13, where she tentatively suggests a link with high-status names based on the attestation of *pgn* in diplomatic cuneiform correspondence where *pgn* styles himself the father of the king of Ugarit, pointing towards an identification as a foreign king (perhaps even of Alashiya, i.e. Cyprus: Astour (1965) 255).

⁴³ É. Masson (1971a).

individuals who happen to have the same name. The different isolated signs in each ball recording the sequence *041-028-021* might then provide a way of distinguishing between two like-named individuals, and likewise for *064-005-024* it could be that in one attestation the name is recorded with a full word designating the individual while in the other two an abbreviation is used. This possibility is all the more likely given that the two inscriptions recording the sequence *041-028-021* at Enkomi seem from their graphic similarities to have been written by the same author,⁴⁴ which might indicate an individual scribe needing to use some sort of abbreviated designation to distinguish between people recorded in the texts he was writing.

While there remains considerable uncertainty over the sign values of Cypro-Minoan, the prospects for identifying onomastic trends in the language or languages recorded in it remain limited. Looking outside Cyprus for comparanda, Mycenaean parallels could point towards patronyms and occupational designations being used to distinguish between individuals with the same name,⁴⁵ while Near Eastern parallels (including Ugaritan ones) suggest that a combination of patronyms, ethnics (i.e. references to places of origin) and other information could be used to designate individuals. In later Cyprus, it could be relevant that the Eteocypriot texts of the 1st millennium BC make clear use of patronymic formulae (see [section 3.3](#) below), which could stem from a continuation of a Late Bronze Age practice of marking patronymy. An intriguing parallel can be found in some entirely unrelated clay balls found in 5th-century BC Sicily, very similar in shape and manufacture to the Late Bronze Age Cypriot clay balls although on average slightly larger, which happen to record Greek names alongside patronyms and are thought to have been used in the casting of lots.⁴⁶ Whatever the onomastic details, references to some sort of ‘surname’ to distinguish between individuals seems much more likely in the context of the clay balls inscriptions than any kind of logographic system designed specifically for economic use for the recording of commodities. It seems better to speak not of logography as we know it in Linear A and B, for example, but rather of abbreviations that we might assume use the first syllable of a word or name as their referent.

⁴⁴ Olivier (2007) 64.

⁴⁵ Discussed in Steele (2009).

⁴⁶ See Lazzarini 1995. I thank my PhD student Natalia Elvira Astoreca for showing me some images of these objects. On some similar objects from mainland Italy inscribed in Oscan and Etruscan, see Maggiani (1994) 68–78.

Up to now our investigation has concentrated mainly on the inscriptions found on the clay balls, with contextual information used only as a corollary where necessary. If we privilege the study of the context over the study of the inscriptions, on the other hand, we can approach the clay balls as objects from a different perspective. A great deal of research has been done on the archaeological context and distribution of the clay balls, especially by Ferrara who has used her contextual study to inform analysis of the texts.⁴⁷ The find spots of some of the Cypriot clay balls were poorly recorded, if they were recorded at all, by archaeologists working in the early 20th century before the establishment of modern working methods. However, fortunately the find spots of some were recorded much more meticulously, giving an opportunity to observe where the objects might have been used. An important concentration of clay balls was found in the 'fortress building' at Enkomi, a large building whose purpose was undoubtedly administrative rather than military as the title suggests, and which was in use for a large part of the Late Bronze Age, with a number of spatial reorganisations and expansions taking place over the centuries. The clay balls found there date to the 13th and 12th centuries BC (LCIIC–LCIIIA), both before and after one reorganisation of the building in the later part of the 13th century as mentioned earlier. Even though the spatial arrangement of the building and the function of its rooms (sometimes residential, sometimes industrial) changed, it is clear that the clay balls remained an important object type utilised by the individuals operating within the building.

The excavator Porphyrios Dikaïos was just one of the scholars who attempted over the years to understand the clay balls through their archaeological context. He observed that five balls originated from room 26 of the fortress building, a room marked by a series of small pits and one large one in the centre that was over 0.5 m wide and 0.8 m deep.⁴⁸ Trying to make out a pattern in the arrangement of the pits, Dikaïos assumed that they were laid out deliberately and that the function of the balls had something to do with the pits. This led to an elaborate theory about a game of 'marbles' in which the balls were thrown into the pits by players standing at the edge of the room – something akin to bagatelle on a larger scale.

Ingenious as it sounds, Dikaïos' theory about such a game can easily be dismissed. Even in room 26 the balls were not found inside the pits, and in other areas of the fortress building clay balls were found in contexts not associated with pits, both in industrial and in residential sectors. Outside

⁴⁷ Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 90–124, (2015).

⁴⁸ See Dikaïos (1969–71) vol. 2 103.

the fortress building, the find spots of inscribed clay balls are even more varied, and this wider distribution must inform any attempt to make sense of their function. Some of the clay balls from Enkomi, as well as those from Kition, were found associated with buildings that had religious functions, including the ‘House of the Ingot God’ at Enkomi; this has also led to some suggestions that they may have been votive items used in religious rites, but again this is a theory that does not take account of the wider distribution. If the Ugaritan parallels were used in the same way as the Cypriot objects, then it may be relevant that one of the Ugarit clay balls inscribed in cuneiform came from a funerary context, although this is not the case for any Cypriot example. Overall the varied contextual associations of the clay balls suggest that they could be found or used in a variety of locations, suggesting a ‘polyvalent role’;⁴⁹ this strongly points towards the balls being portable items, carried by individuals in different day-to-day activities, with a function independent of the contexts in which they were found.

Émilia Masson already in the 1970s had devised a theory that might account for the distribution of the clay balls and the fact that they very probably contain names: she argued that they constituted some sort of ancient equivalent of an identity card.⁵⁰ This would mean that they were carried by individual workers, and would be used by them, perhaps, when they ‘clocked on’ for the day’s work; it would not be inconceivable that they might then carry them to other places by chance, resulting in the mixed distribution seen in the archaeological record. The identity card theory turns the objects into administrative tools, used by Cypriot elites to keep control of important industries – perhaps the most important of all in the Late Bronze Age Cypriot economy, namely the mining and smelting of copper, which was a major constituent of bronze (see further [Chapter 1](#)). It is difficult, however, to prove or disprove Masson’s suggestion.

A final piece of the puzzle is to be found outside of Cyprus, at Tiryns in the Greek Argolid. A Cypro-Minoan inscribed clay ball was found in the site’s Lower Citadel area, dating to the postpalatial period (Late Helladic IIIC, equating to the 12th century BC) after the downfall of the Mycenaean administrations. Despite its distance from the Cypriot find places of all the other Cypro-Minoan clay balls, the Tiryns example appears closely linked to the Cypriot ones. It bears a sequence also attested in other Cypriot inscriptions, *041-041-097*, which is found once in the text of the clay cylinder from Enkomi (*##097*) and also probably in an inscription on the

⁴⁹ Ferrara (2015) 108.

⁵⁰ É. Masson (1971a).

rim of a pithos found at Idalion (##123). The Tiryns clay ball is also very close in both object type and style of ductus to the other clay balls, indicating that it conforms closely with the writing tradition in which they existed. However, the Tiryns ball does not seem to have travelled from Cyprus: the clay of which it is made has a very similar composition to other objects produced at the site and can be assumed to be local, and four uninscribed examples were also found in proximity to it (made of similar clay), indicating that the manufacture and inscription of clay balls was taking place at Tiryns.⁵¹ This may have some ramifications for our interpretation of the function of clay balls and their inscriptions, which were evidently seen as an object type that would be useful and/or desirable to produce outside of the Cypriot contexts to which the majority of surviving examples belong.

What was the function of these clay balls, and why did Cypriots transport the practice of inscribing them abroad to Tiryns? We may never be able to answer these questions with certainty, but we can go some way towards placing the use of the clay balls in context. Indeed, the appearance of an example outside Cyprus at Tiryns may help us to choose between some hypotheses about their use. É. Masson's theory that they may have acted as workers' identity cards requires an assumption that they existed within a tightly controlled administrative setting, but it seems unlikely that we can reconstruct such a situation for Tiryns. The Tiryns clay ball dates from the postpalatial period, i.e. following the demise of the local Mycenaean administration, and was found in an area of the Lower Citadel associated with small-scale industrial activity and with other finds that could point towards links with Cyprus and the eastern Mediterranean.⁵² The appearance of a concentration of marked pottery at Tiryns, undoubtedly related to prevalent Cypriot practices of potmarking, has also been suggested to point towards Cypriot mercantile activity in the area,⁵³ and it is plausible that the clay ball could have originated from Cypriot individuals involved in such activities.

The varied contexts in which Cypriot clay balls have been found, alongside the absence of any obvious administrative context for the Tiryns example, seems to point away from an interpretation of these objects as tools of administrative control. This is not to say that they did not originate within some sort of administrative setting, but their usage seems to have

⁵¹ Vetters (2011) 17–19.

⁵² See Maran (2004).

⁵³ See Hirschfeld (1996) 294–7.

gone beyond any such context. If the two cuneiform-inscribed examples from Ugarit were used for similar purposes to the Cypriot ones, then the discovery of one in a tomb is highly suggestive of an object type that had some personal, if not material, value. The likelihood that their inscriptions recorded names could also speak for a personal connection. Whatever the impetus for their original creation and use, which remains difficult to reconstruct, the use of these items was clearly so entrenched in some areas of Cypriot society that a number of Cypriots carried the practice of creating and inscribing them with them to Tiryns.

3.2.4 Cypro-Minoan and Late Bronze Age Literacy

We have already looked at the earliest surviving Cypro-Minoan inscriptions ([Chapter 1](#)) and at inscriptions from the Cypro-Geometric period that are sometimes classified by modern scholars as the last attested uses of Cypro-Minoan ([Chapter 2](#)). This section is intended to place those extremes into a broader context by looking at the various different types of objects on which Cypro-Minoan inscriptions are found throughout the Late Bronze Age. A wide variety of objects bore shorter or longer Cypro-Minoan texts (usually shorter), and there were some particular practices that can be appreciated within a diachronic Cypriot context, or within a synchronic Mediterranean context. Here the focus shifts away from the content of the inscriptions and towards their function as objects and their place within broader society. We will consider different types of object in turn, beginning with ones made of clay.

It is perhaps already obvious by this stage in the book that clay was a major support of writing in Late Bronze Age Cyprus, and that this fits into much wider trends around the Mediterranean and Near East. In the Aegean, clay documents including ‘flat’ tablets, sealings and labels were in use from the early 2nd millennium BC onwards, and were the tools by which the Minoan and Mycenaean administrations recorded various commodities in which they had an economic interest. To various extents for different periods, we can reconstruct close supervision of resources through Aegean clay documentation, with some changes over time.⁵⁴ In the Near East, clay documents had a much longer history, beginning in the

⁵⁴ The papers by Weingarten, Younger, Tomas and Palaima in Cline (2010) provide helpful overviews of documents used by Bronze Age Aegean administrations. Developments in Cretan Hieroglyphic, Linear A and Linear B documentation have been treated extensively by Tomas (2003), (2008), (2011), (2012), (2014), (2017), and see also Petrakis (2014) and (2017).

4th millennium BC, and so by the time writing appeared in Cyprus in LCI (probably in the 16th century BC), Near Eastern practices of writing on clay were already well over 1,000 years old. Again there was some variation in Near Eastern clay documentation (including 'cushion-shaped' tablets, labels, sealings, cones and cylinders of different shapes and sizes), both over time and from place to place, and they were used for what looks like a considerably wider range of purposes than in the Aegean: centralised supervision of commodities and resources, trades and exchanges, legal processes, belletristic literature and more.⁵⁵ While the term 'Near East' typically is used to refer to Mesopotamia and the Levant, we might also include Anatolia, where the Hittite administration drew heavily on the Near Eastern tradition of writing on clay, adopting cuneiform with it. Cyprus came late to this milieu, and as we saw in [Chapter 1](#) it clearly drew on influences from multiple directions.

The best-attested clay document type in Late Bronze Age Cyprus is the clay ball, which was discussed in detail in [section 3.2.3](#); this represents perhaps the best evidence of what look like innovative and distinctive Cypriot writing practices. Another quite unique Cypriot document type is the clay cylinder, of which one example from Enkomi (##097: [Figure 3.5](#)) and five from Kalavassos (##098–102) have survived; aside from clay



Figure 3.5 Clay cylinder from Enkomi.

⁵⁵ On issues related to the use of cuneiform documents in a number of different societies, the papers in Radner and Robson (2011) offer a useful starting point, and on cuneiform documents in a range of different archival and bureaucratic contexts, see Postgate (2013) and some of the papers in Brosius (2003). These are recommended as some potential paths into the much wider body of literature on cuneiform documentation.

tablets (see below), the cylinders are the longest extant Cypro-Minoan texts, although only the Enkomi example is relatively undamaged to the extent that almost all of its signs can be identified successfully. Writing on cylindrical objects is known in the Near East, but the nearest parallels are clay cones (sometimes known as nails), which usually taper rather than being cylindrical; larger cylinders and prisms that would have stood upright on one end do not provide any close parallel. The function of the Cypriot examples is a mystery, although we can assume that the text was intended to be read on the cylinder itself (i.e. it was not intended to be rolled out onto a soft medium as cylinder seals were), and that it would be necessary to turn the cylinder to read it. An administrative function has been suggested based on the appearance of numerals in at least two of the Kalavassos examples, as well as the find contexts.⁵⁶ The clay balls seem to have been in use for a long period of time, spanning LCII and LCIII, while the cylinders all belong to LCII and may have been more limited in their longevity as an inscription type.

Clay tablets, on the other hand, show a greater degree of direct influence from abroad: probably from the Aegean in the case of the earliest attested example from LCI Enkomi (##001: see [Chapter 1](#)), but from the Near East in the case of the 'CM2' tablets, which are also from Enkomi and date to LCIII. The recently discovered tablets from Pyla-Kokkinokremos are of a flatter type than the CM2 tablets and quite large, perhaps making Aegean page-shaped tablets a better parallel. The four tablets found at Ugarit in the Levant (one of which, ##215, was discussed in [section 3.2.2](#) above) are evidently of Near Eastern style and must be understood within a local Ugaritan context. However, there is a noticeable lack of other clay document types with obvious Aegean or Near Eastern comparanda. There is one example of a clay label that appears to be influenced by Aegean types in the earliest phase of writing (##095: see [Chapter 1](#)), but otherwise labels do not appear (apart from at Ugarit, where they are again best seen as conforming with local epigraphic traditions). Cyprus is also lacking in an important and ubiquitous clay document type well known in both the Aegean and the Near East, namely the sealing – somewhat mysterious considering that cylinder seals were well established on Cyprus, many uninscribed but some bearing short Cypro-Minoan inscriptions. The popularity of cylinder seals, however, may have had more to do with the appropriation of a high-status personal object type, well known in the

⁵⁶ Smith (2002) 23–5, Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 80–1 and n.201.

Near East, by Cypriot elites than with their potential usefulness (in Cyprus, perhaps unrealised) in an administrative setting.⁵⁷

Perhaps what is most striking about the use of clay documentation on Cyprus is the lack of evidence for a coherent system within which it operated, although we must add the caveat that we are at the mercy of what has survived and been excavated (especially given the small number of extant inscriptions) and furthermore we do not know whether perishable materials may have been used alongside ones that have been preserved. Nevertheless, we do not see evidence for the kinds of complex bureaucratic systems witnessed in the Aegean or Near East. The clay balls look like a popular and long-lasting document type, and may have their origins in administrative usage, as difficult as this is to reconstruct. However, the varied contexts in which they have been found (including an example outside Cyprus at Tiryns in Greece) suggest a usage entrenched in daily life and not strongly determined by administrative, industrial, religious and other activities (see further [section 3.2.3](#) above).

Even more telling, perhaps, is the notable lack of uniformity in any tradition of writing on clay tablets. We may not know what we are missing, but we do know that the tablets that have been found have some very different properties, sizes, shapes, text structures and methods of inscription (the latter also indicated by the variety of stylus types attested in the material record). There is some coherence in smaller groups (especially in the CM2 tablets from Enkomi), but no evidence for a broader tradition.⁵⁸ This has been suggested to point towards a situation where Cypriots learnt scribal practices abroad and brought them home but never created a tradition of scribal training,⁵⁹ but do we need to explain what we see by reference to external agency? The opposite is equally possible, namely that Cypriots knew that there were administrations abroad who used particular types of documents in particular ways, but, apart from some perhaps limited flirtation with items like the clay tablet, did not find a use for protracted archival practice in their own society. Clay balls and clay cylinders may represent a desire to shun well-established foreign practices and create document types that, while not entirely out of place in a broader Mediterranean setting, were distinctively Cypriot and arguably adapted specifically for Cyprus' own social and administrative backdrop.

Still in the category of texts on clay items, but in a very different sense from the ones dealt with above, are numerous inscriptions on pottery

⁵⁷ Cylinder seals are addressed in more detail in [Chapter 1](#).

⁵⁸ See Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 211–13.

⁵⁹ Smith (1994) 282–4.

vessels. They are found on a variety of shapes and sizes of vessel (often fragmentary): many are pithoi (large storage jars) or other types of jars or jugs, including amphorae, but there are also examples of inscribed kraters and bowls. Inscriptions on pithoi are often on the rim, and although the function of the texts is not easy to assess, it may be significant that one example (##145) contains a numeral, perhaps suggesting monitoring of commodities. A plausible assumption is that the inscriptions referred to the contents of the vessel in some way; a few inscriptions found on the base of vessels, however, might require a different hypothesis since they cannot be seen without inverting the vessel (among them some imported Mycenaean kraters/jugs found in a tomb at Kition, ##132–4, all with the same two Cypro-Minoan signs incised on the base). Inscriptions can also appear around the body of a vessel.⁶⁰ The most popular position in which to place an inscription, however, was on the handle, and there are at least 37 examples of inscriptions in this position consisting of more than one Cypro-Minoan sign; the signs are usually either read in a column vertically or placed so that it is necessary to orient the handle sideways to read a continuous sequence.

In the case of the numerous inscriptions on jar handles, often only the handle has survived, although sometimes complete vessels have been found or reconstructed.⁶¹ Most examples are or are suspected to be on locally made vessels, although Cypro-Minoan signs can also appear on the handles of vessels imported from the Levant.⁶² Traditionally, inscriptions consisting of more than one sign are separated out as a group for the purposes of investigating formal Cypro-Minoan script and potential underlying languages, and all the inscriptions mentioned above fall into this category. However, when assessing the functions of inscriptions on vessels, especially ones incised on handles, it would be a mistake to exclude single signs (generally referred to as ‘potmarks’) from the investigation. While single signs are difficult to assess as reflexes of literacy, especially when the sign is otherwise unattested as is sometimes the case (perhaps ‘inspired by, but not necessarily borrowed from’ Cypro-Minoan in Hirschfeld’s words⁶³), there can be no doubt that the items on which they appear fall within the same sphere of usage as the ones bearing multiple signs. The practice of marking pottery (whether with short multi-sign inscriptions or single-sign marks) has to be understood within the broader context of well-established

⁶⁰ E.g. ##128, ##157, ##158.

⁶¹ E.g. ##122, ##126, ##127, ##143.

⁶² E.g. ##115, ##118, ##146–8, ##153 and probably ##140.

⁶³ Hirschfeld (2014) 265.

Cypriot-based trading practices that made a mark all around the eastern Mediterranean, as Hirschfeld has shown in a number of publications; analysis of varying trends in adding signs to pots also reveals some coherent marking systems that were used for particular types of vessels.⁶⁴

There is also one painted inscription on a sherd from a libation vessel stand from Enkomi, showing a different method of writing on pottery (##094); although usually labelled as an ostrakon (i.e. a sherd inscribed after breaking), the regularity of the signs and their alignment with bands of colour on the vessel could suggest that writing on this occasion was incorporated into the object's decoration, presumably in a context of religious practice and display.⁶⁵ Paint is otherwise attested among potmarks on a variety of vessels, but usually appearing in the same contexts as incised marks on pots (see above); an imported Mycenaean IIIB jug found in a tomb at Kition, with two large signs painted on the underside of the body, is an exception (##131). An example of what seems to be an incised ostrakon has also been found, again at Enkomi in the Sanctuary of the Horned God, and may suggest the use of sherds as ad hoc basic accounting documents (##093): the short and probably incomplete text clearly contains numerals marked as dots and lines, following signs that could potentially represent ideograms/logograms (one otherwise unattested, the other one otherwise attested only as an isolated sign on a gypsum lid from a pithos found at Kalavassos). Numerals are a considerable rarity in Late Bronze Cypriot inscriptions, and this text has even been suggested to stem from direct influence from Mycenaean accounting practice in LCIIC although this seems unlikely given the restricted nature of Mycenaean literacy.⁶⁶ Here we can also mention a unique clay disc from Golgoi, whose function and context are obscure and that was until recently often considered to be Cypriot Syllabic rather than Cypro-Minoan, with an inscription containing a clear numeral (##092).

Numerous inscriptions have been found on metal objects, of which three miniature copper ingots found at Enkomi, bearing boldly incised Cypro-Minoan signs, have been argued to represent a kind of 'branding' of copper as a primary commodity and export produced in Cyprus. The inscriptions on two of the ingots are almost identical: 102 ' 023 on one (##174) and 102-023 on the other (##176).⁶⁷ The only difference is that in the first the two

⁶⁴ E.g. Hirschfeld (1992), (2008) and especially (2002) where she analyses a large body of material from Enkomi in detail and considers the relationship between potmarking and literacy.

⁶⁵ On the inscription, see É. Masson (1979).

⁶⁶ Palaima (1989b) 43–4. See also Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 75–7, where the question of when the inscription was applied is addressed.

⁶⁷ The same sequence is also found on a clay label from Ugarit (without word divider: ##210).



Figure 3.6 Miniature copper ingot from Enkomi.

signs are separated by a divider (making it a ‘1+1’ type inscription), while in the second they are not. If ‘1+1’ inscriptions are abbreviations for two separate words as suggested in [Chapter 2 \(section 2.5\)](#), then this should make us wary because it would appear that the word divider is not obligatory, and imply that some two-sign inscriptions that we think of as representing whole words could rather be acronymic abbreviations. The third ingot again bears the same two signs, in this case not separated by a divider, and it also has a longer sequence immediately underneath them ([##175: Figure 3.6](#)). All three probably date to LCIIIA. Ferrara and Bell have suggested that these miniature replicates of the larger ingots typically found in trading contexts (such as the large number found in the Ulu Burun shipwreck) could have acted as samples marked with signs that were intended to be understood as a brand of quality and Cypriot origin (with sign 102 *a* standing for Alashiya and 023 *ti* perhaps an abbreviation for a word for copper).⁶⁸

The final group of inscriptions we will consider are some miscellaneous isolated examples on objects that could variously be interpreted as having a connection with wealth, status and religious practice. Two gold rings found in an LCIIA tomb at Kalavassos bear identical sequences of Cypro-Minoan signs, usually assumed to represent the name of their owner; in a tomb with an astounding variety of prestige objects made from luxury materials including gold, silver, ivory and amber, it seems very likely that we are dealing here with a case of Cypro-Minoan writing being used in the display of wealth and status. The early date of these objects may point towards appropriation of writing as a marker of status on a similar timescale to that

⁶⁸ Ferrara and Bell (2016).

in which it began to be used in cylinder seal decoration, these again being personal items probably linked more closely with elite display than administration (see further [Chapter 1](#)). Inscriptions on bronze bowls probably fall into a similar category of wealth and status display, with the text prominently displayed around the rim of the vessel; a silver example from Enkomi has also been found (##182), and another example in silver discovered at Ugarit can be included, although some of its signs are difficult to reconcile with known Cypro-Minoan ones (##216). The longevity of this inscription type was discussed in [Chapter 2](#). Two bronze 'stand rings' from Myrtou show Cypro-Minoan signs incorporated more ostentatiously into decoration within their depictions of hunting scenes (##184–5).

Three inscriptions have been found on ivory objects. One is on a decorated ivory pipe from Kition that Karageorghis interpreted as a pipe for smoking opium, owing to some blackening at one end (##161).⁶⁹ An inscribed ivory rod (solid rather than hollowed out at the end) from the same building at Kition, thought to be associated with religious activity, may have been used for different purposes (##162). It may be no coincidence that a fragment of what was perhaps a similar item bearing an inscription in cuneiform (probably the short Ugaritic cuneiform alphabet) has been found at Tiryns in Greece,⁷⁰ a site that has also produced Cypro-Minoan inscriptions, pointing towards a broader context of Mediterranean connections for these objects. Another inscribed ivory object from the same Kition building where the ivory pipe and rod were found has an even more obvious association with religious activity: it is a thin piece of ivory carved into the shape of the Egyptian god Bes, with a Cypro-Minoan inscription upside-down at the god's feet (##163). Given that these all derive from the same context, it is difficult to say how short-lived or limited this trend for writing on ivory objects may have been.

Finally, an inscribed clay figurine found at Psilatos, and dated to LCIIIA, is worthy of special mention. It depicts a bull (or more properly a zebu, a type of cattle with humped shoulders), with four Cypro-Minoan signs incised into its side as well as a hash-shaped mark on its forehead (the last probably not a script sign): ##103, [Figure 3.7](#).⁷¹ Distinctive clay figurines had a long-lasting presence in prehistoric Cypriot material culture and were

⁶⁹ Karageorghis (1979).

⁷⁰ Cohen, Maran and Vettors (2010).

⁷¹ See Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 2 55.



Figure 3.7 Inscribed clay bull figurine from Psilatos.

still flourishing in the Late Bronze Age,⁷² when bull/zebu figures experienced a resurgence in popularity and account for 81% of surviving animal figurines.⁷³ The appearance of bulls in the Cypriot coroplastic repertoire has sometimes been linked with Aegean influence, but the bull is a very common symbol in other areas of the Mediterranean as well and there can be no doubt that, wherever original influences may or may not have come from, the bull figurine was a common object that was fully at home in Cypriot material culture.⁷⁴ It has been noted that such figurines were often found on the floors of religious spaces, suggesting their use as religious paraphernalia but probably not as offerings,⁷⁵ and they are not closely associated with the practice of literacy: up to now, this figurine is unique in bearing writing.⁷⁶ We might guess that the inscription, which was added before firing and so was a deliberate part of the manufacture process, is a declaration of ownership or perhaps a dedication or other religious text. This suggests something that may also be inferred from other unique or isolated types of inscribed object, namely that literacy was sufficiently widespread for people to experiment with placing it on objects that usually did not bear writing and that already had well-established roles in Cypriot society.

⁷² On Bronze Age Cypriot coroplastic art see Knox (2012) and Karageorghis (1991), (1993).

⁷³ Knox (2012) 167.

⁷⁴ See e.g. Steel (2004) 203–5, Knapp (2013) 463.

⁷⁵ Webb (1999) 219.

⁷⁶ Inscribed figurines are rare elsewhere, though possible parallels in two anthropomorphic figurines from Crete, bearing short inscriptions in Linear A (PO Zg 1 and TY Zg 1), may represent similarly limited experimentation with adding writing to such an object.

3.3 Non-Greek Cypriot Syllabic Inscriptions

3.3.1 'Reading' the Non-Greek Cypriot Syllabic Inscriptions

Cypro-Minoan inscriptions cease to be attested by around the 9th century BC. In fact, even this simple statement is open to question, since the syllabic inscriptions of the 10th and 9th centuries (one of which is a Greek-language text reading *Op^heltau*, 'of Op^heltas') have been suggested by some scholars to be late examples of Cypro-Minoan, but by others to be early examples of the Cypriot Syllabic script, our term for the new writing system developed from earlier Cypro-Minoan (see [Chapter 2](#) for a detailed discussion, especially [section 2.4](#)). Whatever the status of the few texts belonging to this period, we can say with certainty that the surviving inscriptions of the following 8th century BC are examples of the Cypriot Syllabary, the script that was used in Cyprus throughout most of the 1st millennium BC. By this time the signs are recognisable as ones belonging to this script's repertoire, and since the script is deciphered we can get closer to the content of inscriptions. From the 8th century onwards, we begin to find more inscriptions written in the Greek language, a Greek writing tradition that lasted until the script went out of use around the 3rd century BC or later (see [Chapter 5](#), [section 5.3.3](#)). Alongside the Greek inscriptions written in the Cypriot Syllabic script throughout this period, there have also survived a significant number of non-Greek inscriptions written in one or more languages that we cannot understand. It is this 'unknown' linguistic component that is the subject of the second half of this chapter.

While there remain many questions related to the script repertoire and sign values of Cypro-Minoan (see [section 3.2](#) above), the inscriptions from the 8th century BC onwards have the advantage of belonging to a writing tradition that we understand much better. With very few exceptions,⁷⁷ we can be confident that we know the sign values of the Cypriot Syllabary, which existed in two forms: one variant associated with the area around Paphos (Paphian) and another used across the rest of the island (Common). This makes the 'reading' of a 1st-millennium non-Greek syllabic text very different from the 'reading' of a Cypro-Minoan one, since we can at least read out the sequences of signs with a reasonable approximation of what each word may have sounded like. So, for example, when we read the words

⁷⁷ The sign transcribed as *za* or *ga* is the primary example of a sign whose phonetic properties and usage have been the subject of some debate: see Egetmeyer (1993), (2002b), (2010a) vol. 1 §§194–5, 201–2). A recently found inscription to be published by Egetmeyer further shows that even in such a well-understood script there can sometimes be an unexpected degree of sign variation that makes the reading difficult: Egetmeyer (forthcoming).

a-na ma-to-ri in a non-Greek inscription, we have good reason to think that these words may have been pronounced something like *ana matori*, even though we do not know what they mean.

The script type of the Cypriot Syllabary makes readings slightly more complicated, however, because it is a syllabic script whose signs only represent open syllables, either a vowel alone or a consonant + vowel combination; this is quite different from an alphabetic system where most signs represent either a vowel or a consonant on its own. It is well suited to transcribing words that consist of strings of open syllables (consonant-vowel-consonant-vowel etc.), such as the Greek word *gunā* ‘wife’, which was written *ku-na*. However, a special strategy is needed in order to represent two consonant sounds adjacent to each other in a word, or a consonant appearing at the end of a word. For Cypriot Greek written in the syllabic script we can reconstruct the spelling strategies used in such situations.⁷⁸ For example, the Greek name Stasikupros is represented in writing as *sa-ta-si-ku-po-ro-se*,⁷⁹ using ‘dummy vowels’ for consonant clusters and for the final consonant. So, the a-vowel of the first sign *sa* would not have been pronounced (*sa-ta-* = *sta-*), and nor would the o-vowel of the sign *po* (*-po-ro-* = *-pro-*) or the e-vowel of the final sign *se* (*-se* = *-s*). What is written as *sa-ta-si-ku-po-ro-se* is pronounced as *Stasikupros*. The dummy vowel in each case was chosen according to the following vowel sound when the consonant cluster was tautosyllabic, i.e. when the two consonants both fell at the beginning of the same syllable, as in the sequences *sta-* and *-pro-* in this name; for writing a final consonant, the dummy vowel was always e, hence the use of the sign *se* here to represent a final *-s*. When we understand the language of an inscription, it is possible to observe the use of such spelling conventions and to detect the presence of consonant clusters and final consonants, but when the underlying language is unknown it is impossible to be certain whether such features are present or not: for example, does the non-Greek sequence *ke-ra-ke-re-tu-lo-se* represent *kerakeretulose*, or *kerakretulos*, or something slightly different?

In the quest to understand underlying linguistic features, the Cypriot Syllabic script presents us with another disadvantage, namely the limited number of potential phonemic distinctions represented. For example, there is no way of representing the sound /h/ at all, and so if a language written in this script possessed a /h/ phoneme, it would not be written down and

⁷⁸ See O. Masson (1961/83) pp. 68–78 and Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 1 §§242–60.

⁷⁹ Appearing in the Idalion Bronze inscription c.450 BC: O. Masson (1961/83) no. 217, Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Idalion 1.

would be difficult for us to reconstruct.⁸⁰ Further, the properties of voicing and aspiration are not distinguished in the plosive consonants,⁸¹ which meant that in the writing of Greek inscriptions there was no way of distinguishing between, for example, the three Greek phonemes /t/ (unaspirated and unvoiced), /tʰ/ (aspirated but unvoiced) and /d/ (voiced but unaspirated) as all three were written with the t-series of signs (*ta*, *te*, *ti*, *to* and *tu*). This is also the reason why the Greek word *gunā* cited above was written *ku-na*, since a single series of signs was used to represent /k/, /kʰ/ and /g/. When a Cypriot Syllabic inscription is written in an unknown language, we cannot therefore discern whether that language has voiced or aspirated consonants. Taking the example used in the paragraph above, this problem leads to a wide range of possibilities for the phonetic reality of the sequence *ke-ra-ke-re-tu-lo-se*, including *kerakeretulose*, *geragretulos*, *kʰerageredulos*, *gʰerakretʰulose*, and so on. The limitations of the script make it all the more difficult to tell whether we might be able to recognise cognate forms in other languages, and thereby gain some understanding of the origins and linguistic affiliations of the unknown language(s) recorded. Nevertheless, as the [next section](#) will show, it is still possible to study productively some of the linguistic features present in these inscriptions.

3.3.2 Analysing Unknown Language(s)

Notwithstanding the problems highlighted in the [previous section](#), we are in a better position to begin linguistic analysis on the non-Greek Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions of the 1st millennium BC than we are in the case of the Cypro-Minoan inscriptions of the Late Bronze Age. In fact, the presence of non-Greek languages was recognised as early as 1876 by Charles Clermont-Ganeau, writing in the *Revue Critique* in the very early years following the script's decipherment that some Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions might have been written in 'une langue non-héllenique'. Several scholars worked on defining the linguistic features of the longest surviving non-Greek texts in the first half of the 20th century, culminating in the label 'Eteocypriot' (i.e. 'original Cypriot') being attached to these non-Greek texts,⁸² a label that

⁸⁰ The Cypriot Greek dialect is thought to have been psilotic (i.e. to have lacked /h/), but it is not the inability of the script to represent /h/ that proves this: see Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 1 §194. In theory the presence of /h/ could potentially be detected if it made hiatus, e.g. if two adjacent vowels with only /h/ between them were kept separate rather than run together, indicating that /h/ was pronounced.

⁸¹ The only apparent exception is the *ga/za* sign, which sometimes appears where we would expect it to represent *ga* but can also represent *za*. The exact value of this sign remains a subject of debate, and affects our understanding of the pronunciation of the Cypriot Greek dialect. See further Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 1 §195 and especially §202, Valério (2016) 260–3.

⁸² Friedrich (1932). See Steele (2013) 102–4 for an overview of the early scholarship.

has remained popular to the present day, in part because of a lingering assumption that this was a descendant of an earlier Cypriot language. Their investigations revealed a consistent set of linguistic features that can be observed in some but not all such inscriptions. The use of the term ‘Eteocypriot’ has more recently been open to question: should it be used for all Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions that are obviously not Greek, or should it only apply to the subset of non-Greek inscriptions that display a consistent set of linguistic features and can therefore be assigned to a single non-Greek language? To put it another way, is ‘Eteocypriot’ a catch-all term for non-Greek Cypriot inscriptions of the 1st millennium BC,⁸³ or is it our name for one non-Greek language spoken and written on Cyprus in this period? In more recent scholarship there has been a shift towards the latter viewpoint,⁸⁴ although the former can still sometimes be found.

One way of assembling the evidence for non-Greek language written in the Cypriot Syllabic script during the 1st millennium is to use linguistic features as a defining criterion. In this way we can build up a profile for one language with a consistent set of features, which in line with the shift in terminology described above we will refer to as ‘the Eteocypriot language’. As identified by the early 20th-century scholars working on it, the best starting point is a bilingual inscription found in the southern city of Amathus, written in Eteocypriot and Greek – the only complete example of

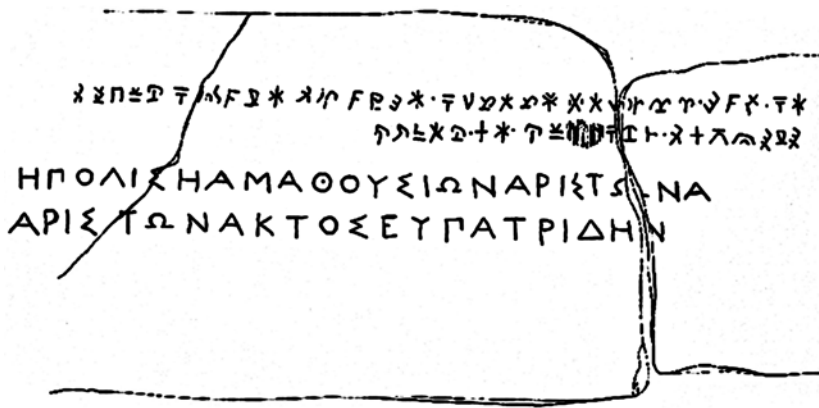


Figure 3.8 The complete Eteocypriot-Greek bilingual inscription from Amathus.

⁸³ More properly, non-Greek *and* non-Phoenician, since the latter language is well attested on Cyprus throughout the 1st millennium, although it is always written in its own script and not in the Cypriot Syllabary.

⁸⁴ E.g. Petit (1997/8), Egetmeyer (2010b), Steele (2013).

such a text that sets a non-Greek language written in the Cypriot Syllabary alongside another language that we understand well (Figure 3.8).⁸⁵ The form of Greek used in the second part of the text, written in the Greek alphabet, is not the local Cypriot dialect but the pan-Mediterranean Koine form that was in widespread use in the late 4th century when this inscription was created. The text of both halves is given below:

Eteocypriot (sinistroverse, Cypriot Syllabary):

1. *a-na ' ma-to-ri ' u-mi-e-sa-i-mu-ku-la-i-la-sa-na ' a-ri-si-to-no-se ' a-ra-to-wa-na-ka-so-ko-o-se*
2. *ke-ra-ke-re-tu-lo-se ' ? ta-ka-na-?-?-so-ti ' a-lo ' ka-i-li-po-ti*

Greek (dextroverse, Greek alphabet):

1. *Η ΠΟΛΙΣ Η ΑΜΑΘΟΥΣΙΩΝ ΑΡΙΣΤΩΝΑ*
2. *ΑΡΙΣΤΩΝΑΚΤΟΣ ΕΥΠΑΤΡΙΔΗΝ*

Translation: *The city of the Amathusians, [to] Aristōn, son of Aristōnax, well-born.*

By comparing each half of the text with the other, it is possible to identify a small number of Eteocypriot linguistic features and begin to define their roles. For the most part, the text in each language looks very different, but there are two words that can be found in both halves: *a-ri-si-to-no-se a-ra-to-wa-na-ka-so-ko-o-se* (*Aristonos(e) Ar(a)towanaksokoos(e)*) in the syllabic Eteocypriot half is clearly equivalent to *ΑΡΙΣΤΩΝΑ ΑΡΙΣΤΩΝΑΚΤΟΣ* (*Aristōna Aristōnaktos*) in the Greek half. This is a Greek name, composed of the name itself with a patronymic, i.e. the father's name used as a sort of 'surname'. Each version of the name looks slightly different, however, and here we can begin to isolate some non-Greek features appearing in this Greek name in the Eteocypriot half of the text. In the Greek half, the name is given in the accusative case, *Aristōna*, and the patronymic is expressed by putting the father's name into the genitive case, *Aristōnaktos*. In the Eteocypriot half, the endings are different: *Aristonos(e) Artowanaksokoos(e)* (with the final -e in brackets because we do not know whether it was pronounced, or whether it is a dummy vowel and only the -s should be pronounced). Firstly, the endings in -o-se look different, and this suggests that Eteocypriot had different morphological endings, or inflection. Secondly, it is striking that while the name and patronym in the Greek half have different endings, in Eteocypriot the name and patronym both appear to end in -o-se. The patronym in the Eteocypriot half also contains a

⁸⁵ For similar methods applied in more recent times, see Steele (2011a), (2013).

sequence *-o-ko-o-* between the main part of the name and the ending, which has long been identified as the Eteocypriot patronymic ‘formula’⁸⁶ – we cannot at this stage be any more specific than to call it a ‘formula’ because we do not understand exactly how it works. It could be a morphological ending, or perhaps a separate word that forms a compound with the name.⁸⁷ One final difference is the rendering of the patronym itself, which in Greek reads *Aristōnaktos* (genitive case, with *Aristo-* at the beginning and /w/ omitted in the middle) but in Eteocypriot reads *a-ra-to-wa-na-ka-so-ko-o-se* (which seems to begin with *Arato-* or *Arto-* and preserves /w/ in the middle). These different treatments may reflect phonological and/or graphic factors. The /w/ has to be omitted from writing in the Greek alphabet because it has no sign to represent it, but the fact that the /o/ before it and the /a/ after it are contracted into one syllable (i.e. *Aristōnax*, not **Aristoanax*) also suggests that the /w/ was not pronounced. More puzzling is the Eteocypriot reduction of the element *Aristo-* to *Arato-* or *Arto-* (depending on whether the a-vowel of the sign *ra* acts as a dummy vowel or not), especially considering that the son’s name contains the same element and it is spelt in the same way in the Greek and Eteocypriot halves (*ΑΡΙΣΤΩΝΑ* = *a-ri-si-to-no-se*).

An examination of just the name repeated in the Greek and Eteocypriot halves of the bilingual has already revealed several Eteocypriot linguistic features. The rest of the inscription is more difficult to analyse, however, because for most of the other words in the Eteocypriot text we have no way of ascertaining how they are related to the Greek text. We can be sure that the Greek and Eteocypriot are two versions of text on the same subject, since they both record the name of the man honoured by the inscription. Beyond this, however, it is impossible to know whether each half conveys exactly the same information. The Eteocypriot half appears somewhat longer than the Greek, but is this because it contains more information, or because Eteocypriot requires more and/or longer words to express the same message? It is in fact very common for bilingual inscriptions to convey different types or amounts of information in each language used, and so we cannot discount one or the other possibility. The only significant breadcrumb to be found is in the word *ke-ra-ke-re-tu-lo-se*, which follows the name *a-ri-si-to-no-se* ‘*a-ra-to-wa-na-ka-so-ko-o-se*. This word, like both parts of the name, ends in *-o-se*. Could that mean that it agrees with the name grammatically? Since our understanding of the type of inflection

⁸⁶ First identified by Sittig (1924).

⁸⁷ See Steele (2013) 147–8.

present in Eteocypriot is limited, it is impossible to be certain, but if it does agree with the name, then it could correspond to the adjective agreeing with the name in the Greek half of the text, εὐπατρίδην, which means 'well-born' (literally 'well fathered').

By analysing the text in this way, we begin to build up a profile of the Eteocypriot language, albeit a patchy one. We have identified some potential lexical, morphological and phonological features in the bilingual, and if we find these in other non-Greek inscriptions then we can conclude that they are likely to be written in the same language, which in turn means that we can fill in some gaps in our profile of the language by identifying further features in those inscriptions. The number of inscriptions that we can identify as written in Eteocypriot in this way is somewhere between 20 and 30, depending on varying degrees of certainty over particular features.⁸⁸ The majority were found at Amathus, with only a few appearing in other areas; as we will see, this opens up the questions of why non-Greek syllabic inscriptions from elsewhere do not seem to contain recognisable Eteocypriot features, and correspondingly whether this particular language was local to Amathus and not spoken widely outside the city.

The Eteocypriot features that we can identify with the most certainty belong to the category of nominal suffixing morphology. As we saw in the case of the Amathus bilingual discussed above, Greek names are sometimes attested in Eteocypriot inscriptions, and instead of displaying Greek inflection as they would in Greek-language inscriptions, they end with sequences that are non-Greek. *Aristonos(e)* where the parallel Greek text has *Aristōna* (the Greek accusative case) is one example, and another long Eteocypriot text from Amathus contains several examples (e.g. Nikandros as *ni-ka-to-ro* and *Ona(s)itimos* as *o-na-i-ti-mo*), sometimes with different endings for a single name appearing (e.g. the name *Onasagoras*, common in Cypriot Greek, appearing as *o-na-sa-ko-ra-ni* and *o-na-sa-ko-ra-no-ti*). Using their appearances on the end of identifiable names as a starting point, we can then look for these terminations in Eteocypriot words. Although it is only attested as an ending for Greek names twice, the ending in *-o-ti* is one of the best-attested Eteocypriot features, with more than 20 attestations including one in a sequence *ke-ra-ka-re-tu-lo-ti*, which is clearly an Eteocypriot word we have already seen, *ke-ra-ke-re-tu-lo-se*, with a different ending. To *-o-ti* we can add a number of less well-attested endings including

⁸⁸ See Steele (2013) 105–18 on identifying Eteocypriot inscriptions and 122–60 on establishing Eteocypriot's linguistic features. The ensuing description of the Eteocypriot language is based on the results of those extended analyses.

-o-se as seen in the bilingual above, -i and -o. The most plausible interpretation of these Eteocypriot ‘endings’ is that they represent something similar to case inflection (a feature of ancient Greek and many other languages), but this does not mean that it works in the same way as in Greek, or that Eteocypriot is necessarily a language of the same type.⁸⁹

While we can go some way towards identifying nominals and some morphology attached to them, there is less evidence for other types of words such as verbs. Although a verbal system undoubtedly existed in Eteocypriot, one of the reasons why we cannot reconstruct it is that we do not know how Eteocypriot sentence structure works: the few texts long enough to contain one or more sentences are mostly made up of words attested only once (or twice if we are lucky), with very few like the Greek names where we can identify the part of speech and guess at their syntactic role. Only four Eteocypriot words occur with more frequency: *ta-na* (three inscriptions, but uncertain in one), *ma-na* (three inscriptions), *o-i-te* (five times in one inscription) and, most frequent of all, *a-na* (seven inscriptions). A survey of the occurrences of each of these words is elucidating only to a limited degree, especially in the case of *a-na*, which is common as first word of an inscription (as in the Amathus bilingual discussed above) but does not always appear in this position and whose function could be interpreted in a number of different ways.⁹⁰ We can also aim to reconstruct phonological features of Eteocypriot, although this is hampered by the Cypriot Syllabic script’s limited ability to represent potential phonemic contrasts, as discussed in the [previous section](#). The use and distribution of signs representing /y/ and /w/, for example, suggests that, in contrast to Cypriot Greek, Eteocypriot at the time of the late 4th-century texts probably had stable /y/ and /w/ phonemes.

The relatively small number of discernible linguistic features of Eteocypriot do not have any obvious parallels in other known languages, and so we cannot identify any linguistic cognates. There is no positive evidence to suggest that Eteocypriot in the 1st millennium BC was an immigrant language, and the opposite is usually assumed to be true, namely that it was the continuation of a language already spoken on the island in

⁸⁹ For example, suffixing morphology can also appear in agglutinating languages, where rather than adding a single ending that encodes both case and number, a string of individual segments is added to encode each feature. Eteocypriot has sometimes been suggested to be related to the much earlier agglutinating language Hurrian (e.g. Petit [1997/8]), but the surviving Eteocypriot inscriptions do not contain any features that would suggest an agglutinating pattern: see Steele (2013) 158–60.

⁹⁰ For different suggestions, see Pedersen (1930) 963–6, Hermay and Masson (1990) 214, Scafa (1993), Petit (1997/8) 250–1. Discussed in more detail in Steele (2013) 125–7.

the 2nd millennium. One tantalising piece of evidence (mentioned also in [section 3.2.2](#) above) could be seen as a potential confirmation of this assumption, namely the prevalence of Cypro-Minoan words ending in sign 023 , which is demonstrably cognate with *ti* signs in Linear A and B as well as the Cypriot Syllabary. This might already put us in mind of the Eteocypriot *-o-ti* ending,⁹¹ and Valério has further pointed out that there are numerous instances where the sign before an *-023* ending in a Cypro-Minoan sequence is confirmed or suspected to contain an *o*-vowel.⁹² We should perhaps be cautious in comparing a single feature in two poorly attested languages, but this is the most persuasive indication that Eteocypriot may be an Iron Age continuation of a language spoken on Cyprus during the Late Bronze Age.

A further problem, as mentioned earlier, is the question of how many different languages are represented by the non-Greek syllabic inscriptions (a problem parallel with, and sometimes seen as related to, that of the number of languages written in Cypro-Minoan: see further [section 3.2.2](#) above). As matters currently stand, we can list some features of a single language that is labelled here 'Eteocypriot', and we can catalogue the inscriptions that show positive signs of these features. However, given our incomplete knowledge of the language, we cannot be certain that inscriptions lacking in these features are not written in Eteocypriot. If future discoveries enable us to fill in some gaps in our knowledge of the language's repertoire then we might find that some of the other non-Greek syllabic inscriptions belong to the same group. On the other hand, it has been suggested that some longer non-Greek inscriptions found at Golgoi in eastern Cyprus could represent a different linguistic group, potentially a survival from a second language of Late Bronze Age Cyprus (thus conforming with a view of 'CM1' and 'CM2' as being used to write different languages).⁹³ However, the non-Greek inscriptions from Golgoi do not display any consistent linguistic features and furthermore are very difficult to analyse because they generally lack word breaks and some are quite damaged. We can be reasonably confident that they are not Greek-language texts, but beyond that it is dangerous to speculate.

The question of how many non-Greek languages feature in the syllabic inscriptions of 1st-millennium BC Cyprus is difficult to answer because of the state of our surviving evidence: we have enough signs of consistent

⁹¹ See also É. Masson (1971a) 25–6, Duhoux (2009b).

⁹² Valério (2016) 397–401.

⁹³ Egetmeyer (2012).

linguistic features in some of the inscriptions to begin to reconstruct one language ('Eteocypriot'), but we do not have sufficient evidence to be certain whether other non-Greek inscriptions are written in the same language or in different ones. However, one thing we can be certain of is that non-Greek language(s) enjoyed a certain visibility in the epigraphic record, and looking at the context of these inscriptions is another way of approaching the island's non-Greek/non-Phoenician linguistic component.

3.3.3 First-Millennium BC Literacy and the Non-Greek Syllabic Inscriptions

First-millennium syllabic inscriptions that we can be reasonably certain are not written in Greek (usually because they are reasonably long yet lack any signs of Greek linguistic features) have been found at several Cypriot sites: Amathus has the greatest number, followed by Golgoi and Paphos, with smaller numbers from Kition, Kourion, Marion and perhaps also Armou, Keryneia and Salamis. There are also some others whose exact provenance is not known, and outside of Cyprus some inscriptions from Egypt. The ones containing confirmed features of the Eteocypriot language are mainly from Amathus, with a few others from Kourion, Paphos, Marion and Abydos in Egypt. The distribution may be significant, although a certain traditional narrative, according to which Eteocypriot speakers were 'pushed' back to a refuge at Amathus as Greek speakers moved in and took control of the island,⁹⁴ has little to recommend it: we do not need to explain the distribution of non-Greek syllabic inscriptions by population movements, and would be better to think in terms of positive choices about what languages to speak and to put in writing.⁹⁵

One noticeable feature of the non-Greek syllabic inscriptions is that there are some regional trends in inscription types. We can start with Amathus, where we know that a particular non-Greek language must have been widely used. The earliest Eteocypriot inscription from Amathus dates probably from the 7th century BC or a bit later and is found on the handle of a colossal limestone vase from the city's acropolis, 1.9 m in height, now housed in the Louvre; the huge object continues to have such symbolic value in the local landscape that a full-size

⁹⁴ See, for example, Gjerstad (1944).

⁹⁵ Steele (2013) 121, Steele (2016b).



Figure 3.9 Reproduction of the Great Vase of Amathus, on the site of the ancient city's acropolis.

reproduction is still displayed at the site today (Figure 3.9). It is very likely that this 'Great Vase', which is plain but for handles decorated with bulls and palmettes, was used for ritual purposes and was associated with a cult of Aphrodite/Astarte at the site.⁹⁶ This is one of few Amathusian Eteocypriot texts of the Archaic period, and apart from three short inscriptions on sherds of pottery dated to the 6th/5th centuries BC, the rest of the site's Eteocypriot inscriptions can be shown or are assumed to date from the 4th century.

A number of the 4th-century Eteocypriot inscriptions from Amathus are broadly speaking monumental in nature, including the complete bilingual inscription discussed in the [previous section](#) (Figure 3.8), which was incised on a slab of black marble and constituted a public declaration by the 'city of the Amathusians' (as the Greek half specifically states) in honour of an individual. Another Eteocypriot/Greek bilingual inscription on a marble statue base has a royal provenance, dedicated by king Androcles of Amathus to 'Cypriot Aphrodite' and there are two further damaged inscriptions with both syllabic and alphabetic text (one of them a stone *thesaurus* chest again dedicated by King Androcles) that we suspect are also bilingual like the

⁹⁶ See Karageorghis (2003a) 218–9.

others.⁹⁷ These inscriptions have to be understood in the context of civic display, whether originating from the citizen body or from the local royal dynasty, with a conscious choice to display the local Eteocypriot language in its traditional script alongside pan-Mediterranean Koine Greek in the internationally accessible alphabet (see further [Chapter 4](#) on such choices). The syllabic-inscribed coins of Amathus, by contrast, appear to give the names of kings (who all have Greek names) with a Greek inflectional ending as was used in other Cypriot kingdoms, although there is one exception in the case of King Purwos, whose name appears on his coinage with an Eteocypriot ending: *pu-ru-wo-so*.⁹⁸

Four other Amathusian inscriptions on stone slabs can be seen as monumental in a different way, being associated with tombs. Again assumed to belong to the 4th century, these are the longest surviving Eteocypriot texts, and although we cannot ‘read’ them, we can pick out some curious features, especially in two that occupy a pair of stones forming a lintel over a single tomb: one of them consists of several phrases interspersed with an otherwise unattested word *o-i-te* (assumed to be a connective joining the different phrases) ([Figure 3.10](#)), while the other is more opaque in its structure but contains seven different Greek names (including one or two patronyms).⁹⁹ Although tombstones can sometimes make reference to

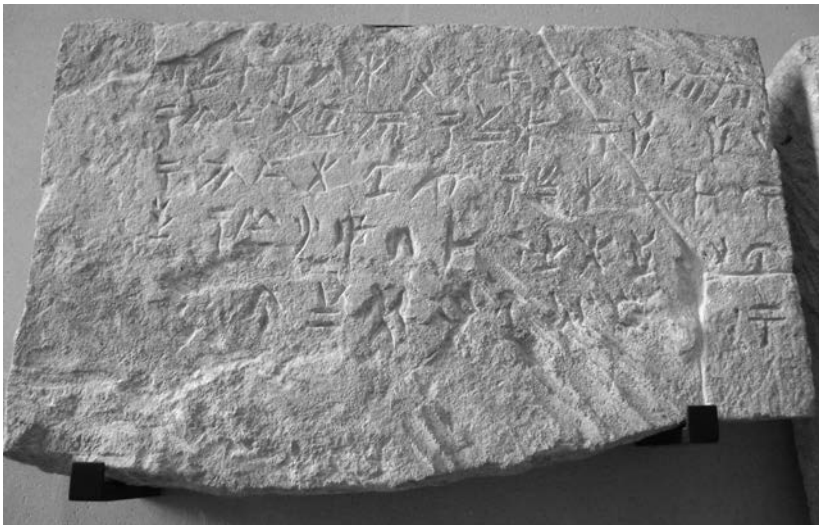


Figure 3.10 Eteocypriot tomb inscription from Amathus.

⁹⁷ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Amathus 18, 17, 33.

⁹⁸ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Amathus 20.

⁹⁹ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Amathus 5, 6.

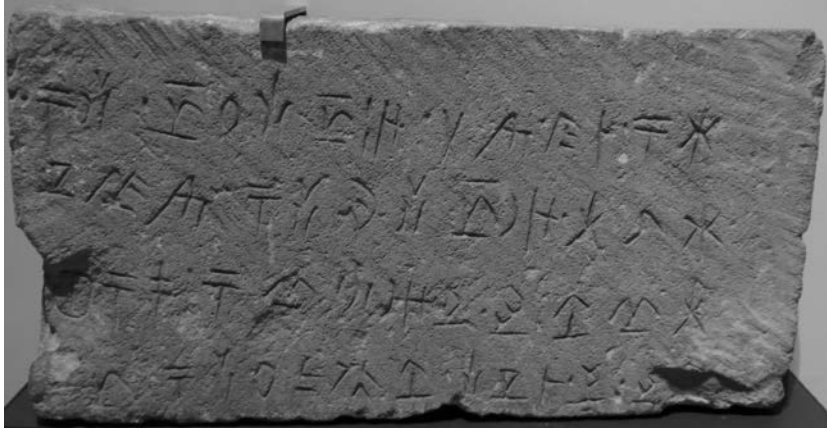


Figure 3.11 Eteocypriot inscription from Amathus.

more than one individual (e.g. more than one deceased individual, or the deceased's family members) it is unusual to find so many different names in one such inscription and we must suspect this to be more than a simple epitaph. In the shorter of the two inscriptions, which appears to have been carved by a different hand, no recognisable names appear, although this does not guarantee that it does not contain Eteocypriot names that we cannot identify; the use of the repeated word *o-i-te*, plausibly interpreted as a connective, could however suggest that the inscription consists of some sort of list (of people, facts, events?). Two further inscriptions on large stone blocks, thought to originate from a tomb at the site of Polemidhia to the west of Amathus,¹⁰⁰ could be from a similar context but their inscriptions again lack recognisable names or consistent features that might help us to reconstruct them as epitaphs or other types of text.¹⁰¹ One of them begins with the word *a-na* (*a-na* ' *ta-si* ' *su-sa* ' *e-ki-wi-ja-ki* ...), like the complete bilingual discussed earlier and a number of other inscriptions, although we do not know how this fact should affect our interpretation of the text. Another stone inscription assumed to be an epitaph consists solely of a Greek name, *Pnutos*, with an Eteocypriot ending: *pu-nu-to-so*.¹⁰²

The monumental stone inscriptions of 4th-century Amathus, all identifiably written in the same language that we have labelled Eteocypriot, show the language as one used for local political and public display. However, not all of the Eteocypriot inscriptions from Amathus belong to

¹⁰⁰ See O. Masson (196/183) p. 398.

¹⁰¹ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Amathus 3, 4.

¹⁰² Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Amathus 1.



Figure 3.12 Stone cut in the shape of a writing tablet, from Amathus.

such an overt context of display, for example a number of pottery fragments bearing short Eteocypriot inscriptions, most from the 6th/5th century BC.¹⁰³ Finally, a piece of stone cut in the shape of a writing tablet (similar in shape to the famous Idalion Bronze but with its text oriented in a perpendicular direction) may point towards the use of Eteocypriot in documents of a more ephemeral nature, since it imitates an object that would typically have been made of wood (Figure 3.12). This serves as a reminder that we must be careful in an analysis of surviving inscriptions on durable materials such as stone and pottery, as it is almost impossible to reconstruct the use of writing on wood and other perishable media.

Despite the caveat above, the surviving inscriptions from Amathus give us a sense of some of the situations in which Eteocypriot language was being written down, and represent not only a reflex of the language as spoken at the site but also a deliberate choice to display the language in particular public or political contexts. Texts that we can confirm to be written in the same language appear in a few other locations (especially Paphos), but never in a context of monumental display comparable with

¹⁰³ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Amathus 8–10, 14, 30, 42 and perhaps 55 (whose non-Greek sequence, *a-wa-pu-ki*, does not contain any known Eteocypriot features but is likely to be written in this language considering its provenance).

what we see at Amathus. The Paphian Eteocypriot inscriptions in particular show the language being written in similar contexts to those in which the Greek language was being written at the site, especially two texts originating from the large number of inscribed stones found at Kouklia-Paphos, which have been interpreted as coming from a siege ramp erected during the Persian siege of the city during the Ionian Revolt in 498/7 BC.¹⁰⁴ The context of most of these stones appears to be a religious one, with some bearing longer Greek dedications while others bear short inscriptions (sometimes of the '1+1' type, discussed in [Chapter 2, section 2.5](#)) that may be abbreviated names or dedications. Among these, an inscription on a rounded stone 'drum' reading *ta-na-ṣi-o-ti* and one on a fragment of stone (reused in a building but probably from the same context) reading *sa-ma-lo-ti* fit in well with the rest of the inscriptions in terms of object type and length of text but happen to be written in Eteocypriot, as confirmed by their endings in *-o-ti*.¹⁰⁵ This suggests Eteocypriot speakers taking part in the same religious practices but using their own language rather than Greek. A similar conclusion can be drawn from two Eteocypriot graffiti found at Abydos in Egypt, which are among a greater number of Greek Cypriot Syllabic graffiti and show the use of Eteocypriot and Greek again in the same milieu, in this case as used by Cypriot travellers or mercenaries abroad (see further [Chapter 5](#)).

A recently (re)discovered inscription of unknown provenance shows the Eteocypriot language used on a decorative triangular pediment that can be assumed to have acted as a funerary monument. The object is one of the longest surviving Eteocypriot texts and is of great importance for our understanding of the language, although its reading is made difficult by some unusual sign shapes that do not conform well with signs of Common signary as we know them from other inscriptions.¹⁰⁶ Even so, we can recognise three examples of Eteocypriot endings in *-o-ti*, as well as an example of the sign *ja* after an o-vowel (where it cannot be a glide, which is what the sign always represented in Greek usage). A similar stone with triangular pediment from Salmiyou (mid-5th century BC), bearing a Paphian syllabic Greek inscription, provides a typological parallel although its text runs in straight lines across the middle of the pediment rather than being inclined in different directions

¹⁰⁴ On their context and the types of inscription found, see O. Masson and Mitford (1986) 7–10.

¹⁰⁵ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Paphos 148, 149.

¹⁰⁶ See Egetmeyer (forthcoming).

around a central figure as in the Eteocypriot example. The provenance of this new Eteocypriot-inscribed object is unknown; an Amathusian origin would be a tempting suggestion considering that this is the only site where monumental texts with confirmed Eteocypriot features have been found, but on the other hand the appearance of the stone looks more in keeping with the archaeological record of Golgoi (on which site, see further below).

It would be unnecessarily limiting to restrict this discussion to the inscriptions that display positive evidence of Eteocypriot features, considering our patchy knowledge of the language's repertoire. As pointed out in the [previous section](#), some of the non-Greek inscriptions that do not contain known Eteocypriot features could nevertheless be written in that language, and it is an open question as to whether one or multiple language(s) other than Greek were written in the Cypriot Syllabary. We can nevertheless observe some of the various contexts in which non-Greek language(s) was/were being written down in the syllabic script. Syllabic non-Greek inscriptions on bronze vessels from Armou (7th century BC) and Paphos (c.700 BC), for example, show the continuation of a tradition of inscribing such objects that began in the Late Bronze Age (see further [Chapter 2, section 2.5](#)), and a silver cup of unknown provenance can also be mentioned here.¹⁰⁷ Only the one from Paphos has a known Eteocypriot feature, but they are all plausibly interpreted as part of the same ongoing tradition of writing on such vessels. The most numerous of the non-Greek syllabic inscriptions are short texts on various types of pottery, appearing from the earliest instances of the Cypriot Syllabary in the 8th century onwards, sometimes with known Eteocypriot features but often not; again this mirrors a longstanding trend of writing syllabic Greek inscriptions on pottery vessels.

While small numbers of non-Greek syllabic inscriptions appear in various locations across the island, the site of Golgoi is particularly worthy of mention as one that has preserved a significant concentration of longer non-Greek texts. Many inscriptions from Golgoi, a majority of which are written in syllabic Greek, originate from a sanctuary site probably with two temples, of which one may have been dedicated to Apollo considering the number of inscriptions found there honouring this particular god. Among

¹⁰⁷ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Armou 1, Paphos 249 (with an Eteocypriot ending in *-o-ti*), No provenance 40 (lacking known Eteocypriot linguistic features although its *so* sign is characteristic of the single-chevron type found at Amathus and may indicate an Amathusian origin).



Figure 3.13 Stone step or footstool with a non-Greek syllabic inscription.

a larger number of Greek inscriptions are several long non-Greek ones that have continued to defy interpretation and some occasionally suspected to be ‘magical’ nonsense texts; it is much more likely, however, that the latter group are genuine inscriptions that are written in a language we do not understand. They do not preserve any known Eteocypriot features and could perhaps represent a different Cypriot language.¹⁰⁸ Although we cannot understand them, what is striking is that the non-Greek syllabic inscribed objects are typical of other objects found at the site, including for example a votive sculpture of an ear that fits in well among a variety of other votive body parts (among which another ear has a Greek syllabic inscription) and a votive step or footstool similar to an uninscribed example (Figure 3.13).¹⁰⁹

Another long non-Greek syllabic inscription from Golgoi is found on a fragment of limestone originating from what was probably a colossal vase, judging by the curvature of the piece, decorated with a serpent and a dolphin in relief (Figure 3.14). Although the stone is quite weathered, it is possible to make out some sequences of signs, none of which preserves traces of any recognisable Greek words. The decoration on this vase fragment is clearly very different from that of the Great Vase of Amathus (see Figure 3.9 above), but it is likely that both were used in

¹⁰⁸ See further Egetmeyer (2012).

¹⁰⁹ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Golgoi 29 and 39 respectively.



Figure 3.14 Fragment of a colossal limestone vase with a non-Greek syllabic inscription.

connection with cult practice, whatever the local differences in such activities.

It is clear that the epigraphic record of Golgoi is closely connected with religious activity at the site, and against this backdrop it was not only Greek but also a local non-Greek language written in the same syllabic script that appeared in inscriptions. The use of one language or the other was evidently not determined by the function of the inscribed item, as shown by the similarities between Greek-inscribed and non-Greek-inscribed votive and other objects.

In the case of Golgoi we are again dealing with a situation in which another language was being used, written and displayed within the same milieu as Cypriot Greek, and this is a trend that seems to hold true for several other sites across the island. The only exception was Amathus, where the Eteocypriot language seems to have held a position of local prestige sufficient for it to be chosen as a language to be displayed in monumental and civic contexts. Such a conscious choice placed the Eteocypriot language visibly as part of local landscape and society in a way that was unique to Amathus. Nevertheless, Eteocypriot and perhaps another non-Greek language evidently remained in use in daily life and sometimes surface in the epigraphic record in contexts that do not look unusual or markedly different in Cypriot society.

*... history is part of the conscious tradition of a people and is operative in their social life. It is the collective representation of events as distinct from events themselves.*¹

4.1 Language and Identity

For the major part of the 1st millennium BC (9th–3rd centuries), which will be the primary focus of this chapter, we have considerable evidence that Cyprus was home to multiple languages: the best attested are Greek and Phoenician, as well as one or more unidentified languages. Politically, the island was divided into a number of city states, each of which was independent and home to an administration that conducted its official business in one of the languages.² For example, at Paphos in the south-west, Cypriot Greek was the language of official inscriptions, while at Kition in the south-east it was Phoenician, and at Amathus on the south coast it was an unidentified language, commonly labelled by modern scholars as ‘Eteocypriot’ (the evidence for which was discussed in detail in [Chapter 3, section 3.3](#)). Although there was apparently some political separation of the languages, the epigraphic record of the island shows that they were not separated in all areas of life. Even a city that was home to a particular predominant language can often provide evidence for one or more other languages in the inscriptions found there: Paphos, for instance, supplies examples of Phoenician and Eteocypriot inscriptions as well as a much larger number in Greek, while Greek alone is the language of its administrative and royal inscriptions. This is also the case in several other

¹ Evans-Pritchard (1962) 21.

² On the political geography of Cyprus during the 1st millennium, see Stylianou (1992), Iacovou (2002b), (2013b). During periods when Cyprus was incorporated into the territory of external powers (Assyria, Egypt, Persia), the local power of the city kingdoms across the island was not significantly affected (see Reyes (1994) 49–97, Caprez-Csornay (2006), Cannavò (2010)). This is obvious, for example, in the period of Assyrian dominance, from the lists of Cypriot city states paying tribute to Assyrian kings in the Stele of Sargon II set up at Kition on Cyprus (late 8th century BC) and the Prism of Esarhaddon found at Nineveh (first half of 7th century BC): Yon (2004) nos. 4001 and 39. The city states are listed in these inscriptions as separate entities with their own kings.

Cypriot locations. It is difficult to map the areas where different languages were being spoken by looking only at the evidence of surviving writings, which may not be fully representative (or could even be mis-representative) of the distribution of spoken languages. However, taken as a whole, the epigraphic record does tell us that the different languages of 1st-millennium Cyprus were being written down at different locations across the island, often with significant geographical overlap.

The mixed distribution of surviving epigraphy suggests that to live in Cyprus in the mid-1st millennium BC was to live on a multilingual island and in a multilingual community. Recent studies have emphasised that the island's linguistic diversity has left little trace in its material remains, with the archaeological record pointing towards a *facies* that is 'ethnically homogeneous',³ and lacking in obvious internal political or cultural divisions made on an ethnic basis.⁴ This suggests that linguistic boundaries did not necessarily coincide with perceived ethnic ones, if such existed, and that speakers of different languages were participating in the same cultural activities and traditions as each other to a considerable extent. In fact it is difficult to reconstruct ethnic boundaries at all, given the island's general cultural homogeneity: would a Cypriot whose first language was Greek have thought of another Cypriot whose first language was Phoenician as belonging to a different ethnic group, or not? Apart from the use of different languages in inscriptions, and some hints from the historical record that often come from outsiders anyway (see below), there is no direct evidence for ancient Cypriots' views about their own and their neighbours' membership of local cultural or ethnic or linguistic groups. As modern studies of ancient ethnicity have shown, ethnic identities are fluid entities that are constructed through the expression of shared traits or values by individuals and communities (consider also Evans-Pritchard's comment on conscious representation as opposed to fact). This is a roundabout way of saying that the more evidence we have for ancient Cypriots' views about themselves and what was important to them, the more chance we have of reconstructing whether they had a sense of communal identity, or whether they saw their island as ethnically divided, or whether they attached any importance to the language(s) spoken by an individual or within a community.⁵

³ Cannavò (2011) 43.

⁴ See especially Iacovou (2006), (2007).

⁵ In the growing literature on ancient ethnicity and identity, Hall (1997) is particularly useful for understanding many of the precepts that underpin modern studies, while the collected papers in McInerney (2014) show a range of recent responses to ethnicity in the ancient Mediterranean; in particular, in the latter collection, Knapp (2014) takes an archaeological approach to Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age Cypriot ethnicity, while Haarmann (2014) discusses the relationship between ethnicity and language.

It appears from the evidence of the epigraphic record that choices of language and script played an important role in the construction of a collective Cypriot identity. In writing, for example, a clear social significance was attributed to the local syllabic script, which was maintained in both private and public inscriptions for hundreds of years while the Greek alphabet became the dominant script all over the Mediterranean in the rest of the Greek-speaking world.⁶ The script was a Cypriot peculiarity, and was used by speakers of Greek and of other unidentified local language(s) (including Eteocypriot); to an outsider who could not read this obscure local script but who could still appreciate its visual impact, a Greek Cypriot Syllabic inscription would convey not the Greek language but the Cypriot identity of its author. Furthermore, when used for Greek this script is inextricably associated with the Cypriot Greek dialect, and even towards the end of its life is never used directly to write any other variety of Greek. Another feature of a number of Cypriot inscriptions was the decision to include not one but two Cypriot languages (e.g. Phoenician and Greek, or Eteocypriot and Greek) in the text, thus making visible the co-existence of spoken languages. Such choices play a role in the collective (self-) representation of Cypriots as inhabitants of an island that was independent of and different from the rest of the Mediterranean, and that was cosmopolitan and multilingual. The representation of such features in writing correlates with the frequently 'mixed' nature of Cypriot artistic styles, blending Aegean and Near Eastern influence in their iconography to create a unique Cypriot product. However, explicit references to any kind of linguistic identity are somewhat sparse and/or indirect, and it is not a simple task to try to reconstruct exactly what ancient Cypriots thought about themselves.

External, non-Cypriot accounts of Cyprus tended to view the island as divided into independent city states but often without clear demarcation of ethnic or even linguistic boundaries. Herodotus in his history of the Persian Wars, for example, includes an account of the role of Cyprus in the Ionian Revolt (499–493 BC): he says that all the Cypriots (referred to throughout as Κύπριοι) joined this revolt against Persian rule when urged to do so by Onesilos king of Salamis, with the sole exception of the inhabitants of Amathus, who refused to listen to him (5.104). There is no explicit mention of any internal ethnic or cultural divisions here, only actions relating to particular individual agents and cities. However, later in this account he tells us that the Cypriots were fighting on two fronts, and while the Cypriot

⁶ See Iacovou (2013a).

army was eventually routed on land, a Phoenician fleet off the coast of Cyprus was defeated by the Cypriots' allies, the Ionians. Herodotus draws a distinction between the Phoenicians (Φοίνικες) and the Persians (Πέρσας), both fighting on the enemy side, for example in the beginning of the Cypriot kings' address to their Ionian allies (5.109):

ἄνδρες Ἴωνες, αἴρεσιν ὑμῖν δίδομεν ἡμεῖς οἱ Κύπριοι ὁκοτέροισι βούλεσθε
προσφέρεισθαι, ἢ Πέρσῃσι ἢ Φοίνισι

Men of Ionia, we Cypriots give you the choice of which you would like to face, either the Persians or the Phoenicians.

What Herodotus does not mention, however, is whether any of these Phoenicians were from Cyprus; nor does he tell us whether Phoenicians living in Cyprus were themselves fighting on the side of the Persians. Modern scholarship has often assumed that known examples of Greek/Phoenician tension on Cyprus must have been related to a division between Cypriot Greek kings, participating in the Ionian Revolt on the Greek side, and Cypriot Phoenicians (in particular the Phoenician dynasty at Kition) siding with the Persians. Most significantly, the text of the longest syllabic Cypriot Greek inscription, the 'Idalion Bronze', has often been cited in attempts to assemble external and internal evidence for a situation of ethnic hostility in the island in the 5th century BC. The Idalion Bronze is a double-sided tablet that refers to medical provision on the occasion of an unsuccessful attack on the city of Idalion by the Persians and by Cypriot Phoenicians from Kition (Figure 4.1).⁷ It is easy to see why scholars were sometimes keen to read this event as one that took place during or shortly after the Ionian Revolt,⁸ but more recent studies have shown that a broader view of the evidence points towards the Idalion Bronze dating to a slightly later period of the 5th century BC.⁹ The evidence pieced together from Herodotus and from the Idalion Bronze inscription is simply insufficient to build up any general picture of hostility between different groups on the island, and both accounts must tie in to very specific events in the course of Cyprus' own history and its relationship with the wider Mediterranean world during the 5th century.¹⁰

⁷ O. Masson (1961/83) no. 217, Egetmeyer (2004), (2010a) vol. 2 Idalion 1.

⁸ E.g. Gjerstad (1935) 625–6.

⁹ See Hatzopoulos (2009), Stager and Walker (1989) 464–5, and Gaber (2008) for an overview of the problem. The history of Idalion, which we know to have changed hands from Greek to Phoenician administration during the 5th century, is considered further below (section 4.2.2 s.v. Idalion).

¹⁰ See Maier (1985).

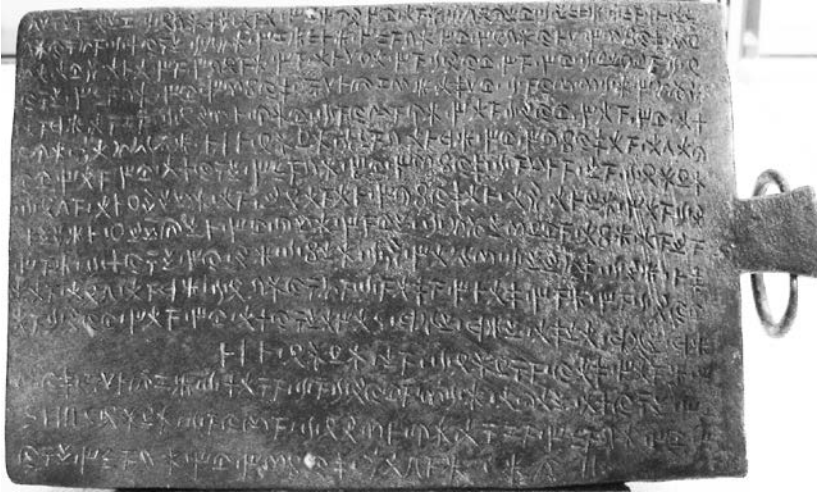


Figure 4.1 The Idalion Bronze.

In fact, the Idalion Bronze itself does not include any reference to broader ethnic designations at all, only to local designations based on Cypriot city names. It begins with a brief explanation of the parties involved in the conflict:

o-te ' ta-po-to-li-ne-e-ta-li-o-ne ' ka-te-wo-ro-ko-ne-ma-to-i ' ka-se-ke-ti-e-we-se
When the Medes (= Persians) and the Kitians besieged the city of Idalion.

Only the Persians are given a broad ethnic designation (*ma-to-i* = *Mādoi*, 'Medes'), but the other aggressors are described only as *ke-ti-e-we-se* 'Kitians'. We know that the city of Kition was a primary centre of Phoenician political and cultural activity on Cyprus from other sources (see [section 4.2.2](#), s.v. Kition below), which is why we can assume quite safely that the Kitians referred to here were Phoenicians – but it is important to note that the author of the inscription does not label them as Phoenicians (just as the inhabitants of Idalion are referred to only as the Idalians, and never for example as Greeks or even Cypriots). This inscription seems to show that city-based designations were the main terms of reference for Cypriots when speaking about themselves or about other Cypriots. In turn, this is quite different from Herodotus' external view, which predominantly casts broad distinctions between Cypriots, Phoenicians and Persians, although he does speak of the role of individual Cypriot city states.¹¹ Herodotus' account

¹¹ There have been numerous studies of Herodotus' ethnography of the Persians and his use of ethnic labels including the terms 'Mede' and 'Persian'. See for example Graf (1984), Tuplin (1994), Pelling (1997), Thomas (2011).

does not help us to reconstruct a picture of the Cypriots' own views of ethnic or linguistic boundaries, and while it is possible that his label Κύπριοι was intended to refer only to non-Phoenician Cypriots, this is ultimately a modern assumption that may or may not be accurate.

In the epigraphic record, Cypriots do not refer to themselves as Cypriots. As in the Idalion Bronze, they refer to themselves as belonging to one or another Cypriot city, even when they are abroad (see [Chapter 5, section 5.2.2](#), especially s.v. Egypt). However, one notable area in which the island's name played a role is in onomastics: there are numerous attested Cypriot Greek personal names that begin with *Kupro-* or end with *-kupros*, with attestations for example of both Kuprophilos and Philokupros (meaning something like 'one to whom Cyprus is dear'). As far as we know, names of this type are limited to Cypriot Greek inscriptions, and never feature for example in the Cypriot Phoenician onomastic record. *Kupro-* / *-kupros* names are already attested at the beginning of the 7th century and remain in currency up to the 4th century BC, and they are especially common in, although not exclusive to, royal dynasties. To what extent these names are linked with social status or political statements of independence is difficult to judge, but it is clear that they are linked with an expression of belonging to Cyprus as a whole island (rather than to any particular Cypriot city).¹² It is particularly striking that while in this way the name of the island played a considerable role in Cypriot Greek personal naming traditions, conversely the city designations, so commonly used by Cypriots to refer to themselves explicitly in inscriptions, are completely lacking from the onomastic record.¹³

Returning to external sources, the 4th-century BC geographical text known as the *Periplus*, which claims falsely to be written by a famous earlier geographer called Skylax (hence the author being referred to in scholarship as Pseudo-Skylax), has more potential to be of use in looking for linguistic groups since it shows a view of Cyprus that attributes ethnicity to individual city states along what are in part linguistic lines (103):

Κύπρος. κατὰ δὲ Κιλικίαν ἔστι νῆσος Κύπρος, καὶ πόλεις ἐν αὐτῇ αἶδε· Σαλαμίς Ἑλληνίς, λιμένα ἔχουσα κλειστὸν χειμερινόν· Καρπάσεια· Κερύνεια· Λήπηθις Φοινίκων· Σόλοι, καὶ αὕτη λιμένα ἔχει χειμερινόν· Μάριον Ἑλληνίς· Ἀμαθοῦς, αὐτοχθονές εἰσιν. αὗται πᾶσαι λιμένας ἔχουσιν ἐρήμους. εἰσὶ δὲ καὶ ἄλλαι πόλεις ἐν μεσογείᾳ βάρπαροι.

¹² See Fourrier (2006) on Cypriot 'ethnic' designations generally (101–3 on *Kupros* names); also Palaima (2005) 10–11.

¹³ See Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 1 §§380–1.

Cyprus. And by Cilicia is the island of Cyprus, and on it are the following places: Greek Salamis, which has an enclosed winter harbour; Karpaseia; Keryneia; Lepethis [i.e. Lapethos] of the Phoenicians; Soloi, and this has a winter harbour; Greek Marion; Amathus – they are autochthonous. All these have abandoned harbours. There are also other barbarian cities inland.

The *Periplus* as a whole is primarily concerned with giving an inventory of places encountered in a voyage around the Mediterranean, and Cyprus constitutes only a short section within the longer work. In keeping with the remit of the work, only coastal sites are mentioned (with a great interest in the state of their harbours¹⁴), and even then there are some notable omissions, in particular the well-established cities of Paphos and Kourion in the island's south-west. The omissions could reflect external or specifically Athenian views of Cyprus' political situation related to the prominent status of Salamis in the island's east,¹⁵ or simply an incomplete circuit of the island in a clockwise direction. So already there is a sense that this may not be a completely accurate picture or that some key elements may be missing.

Nevertheless, what Pseudo-Skylax has to say about the ethnic affiliation of some of the cities is striking. Two cities are specifically labelled as Ἑλληνίς 'Greek', Salamis and Marion. Lapethos is labelled as Φοινίκων 'of the Phoenicians', while an aside brands the residents of Amathus as αὐτοχθονές 'autochthonous' or 'aborigine'. Unnamed inland cities are furthermore labelled as βάρπαροι 'barbarian', which in Greek tradition referred specifically to outsiders who spoke languages other than Greek, and suggests that spoken language might be seen as an explicit marker of local identities in this account. There is some uncertainty as to where Karpaseia, Keryneia and Soloi fit in to the ethnic/linguistic divisions that are drawn in this paragraph of the *Periplus*. Are they not given specific ethnic labels because the author does not know much about them, or because they are not strongly one thing or another (potentially suggesting mixed populations)? The use or non-use of ethnic/linguistic labels sometimes appears quite sporadic in this work, and we should not perhaps read too much into the omission of such labels in the Cypriot passage.

In other sections of the *Periplus* cities are often referred to as Ἑλληνίς 'Greek', for example some but not others in Macedonia (66), or in Spain and France where Emporion and Massalia are labelled as 'Greek cities' (2). Tellingly, the adjective Ἑλληνίς is not used at all in the section of the *Periplus* dealing with the main part of Greece itself (33–65), which suggests that it is

¹⁴ See Counillon (1998) on the contrast between 'enclosed' and 'abandoned' (i.e. vulnerable?) harbours.

¹⁵ Shipley (2011) 177.

reserved for areas where there are both Greek and non-Greek elements of the local population and thus potential ambiguity over a city's perceived ethnic/linguistic affiliation. Aside from Lapethos, only two other cities mentioned in the *Periplus* are described as being Φοινίκων 'of the Phoenicians': Myriandros in Cilicia and Tripoli in Syria. The latter is notable in that it is the only one described in this way in a section that focuses on modern Lebanon and names a number of cities (Arados, Tyre, Sidon) that we know to have been Phoenician centres and home to Phoenician speakers (104.2); the section immediately follows one that describes Συρία 'Syria' (also called the land of the Σύροι 'Syrians') (104.1) and precedes one where the city of Sarepta is described as being Τυρίων 'of the Tyrians'. This shows some complexity in the representation of the people that we collectively label as Phoenicians in modern scholarship. In turn, this may also cast some doubt on the picture of Greek and Phoenician affiliation for some cities painted by Pseudo-Skylax, although, as we will see below (throughout [section 4.2.2](#)), his labels are sometimes reinforced by other evidence pertaining to the individual cities.

The problems associated with the external evidence, not least that of their distance from Cypriot views about ethnic/linguistic groups on the island, may lead us to assign greater importance to internal evidence. Despite the lack of direct references to language use, surviving Cypriot inscriptions demonstrate that linguistic diversity was a phenomenon that was often on the agenda when an individual chose to write or commission an inscription. Putting a message in writing forces the author to make certain choices about language and script, and to consider issues such as the arrangement of the text on the object and its intended audience. Some of those choices were probably easier than others. For example, for an individual to use his own local language and a writing system with which he was familiar, or for the author of an official inscription to use the language and script most commonly used in local administration, might seem obvious choices. On the other hand, a choice to place a particular piece of text in a prominent position, or to include a second language and/or script in the inscription, would require more thought and could arise from a deliberate strategy to engage with or send a message to the text's potential readers.

Out of more than 2,000 inscriptions surviving from the mid-1st millennium (from the 9th and 8th centuries BC when Phoenician and Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions begin to appear, to about the 3rd or 2nd century BC when they disappear), it is particularly a small number of bilingual and digraphic texts that give us an opportunity to observe how

and why different Cypriot languages and scripts were chosen to be placed next to one another on an object.¹⁶ These inscriptions make language contact visible and explicit, and each has an individual context and has arisen from a specific set of socio-cultural conditions. Before considering the explicitly bilingual inscriptions, however, the distribution of different languages in the extant epigraphic record must be considered: the evidence for different languages being used and written at particular sites is itself important evidence for language contact and can reveal something about the linguistic range that was visible to the literate ancient Cypriot individual.

4.2 Evidence for Linguistic Diversity

4.2.1 The Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age

Before the arrival of the Greek and Phoenician languages on Cyprus, it is likely that the island was already multilingual, and it is worth considering what we know about the Cypriot linguistic situation in the Late Bronze Age and hence what Greek and Phoenician speakers might have encountered when they arrived. Such a survey could be of further significance if the unidentified languages of the 1st millennium (including Eteocypriot) could be demonstrated to be survivals of Late Bronze Age Cypriot languages, which has been seen as the likeliest hypothesis to explain their origins,¹⁷ but cannot be proven beyond doubt.

The surviving Late Bronze Age Cypro-Minoan inscriptions have already been discussed in the three preceding chapters (see especially [Chapter 3](#), [section 3.2](#), on the current state of knowledge related to these texts and their epigraphic features). They remain undeciphered, but nevertheless may give some limited indication of a variegated epigraphic, and perhaps also linguistic, landscape during some or all of this period. One potential piece of evidence for linguistic diversity in the Late Bronze Age, despite our inability to read their script, is the diversity of the Cypro-Minoan inscriptions themselves. In particular, it appears that the surviving inscriptions may represent more than one writing system, i.e. two or more scripts with different repertoires of signs and presumably different

¹⁶ This chapter is concerned mainly with bilingual inscriptions, in which there is input from two languages. Another important group of inscriptions comprises bi-dialectal texts, composed in the local Cypriot Greek dialect (written in the Cypriot Syllabary) and the pan-Mediterranean Koine Greek dialect (written in the Greek alphabet); these are discussed in the following chapter ([section 5.3](#)).

¹⁷ Discussed in [Chapter 3](#), and see Egetmeyer (2010b), (2012).

structures, and while such a conclusion has been challenged it appears from examination of some of the longest surviving documents that three clay tablets from Enkomi (usually labelled ‘CM2’) can plausibly be viewed as belonging to a separate writing tradition (discussed further in [Chapter 3, section 3.2.2](#)).

We may nevertheless question whether the possible existence of two or more different scripts in Late Bronze Age Cyprus would be relevant to a discussion of linguistic diversity. É. Masson, who first proposed the existence of multiple writing systems, had already suggested that her different Cypro-Minoan epigraphic groups serve ‘vraisemblablement à noter des langues différentes’.¹⁸ From a purely typological point of view it is not implausible to suggest that a script with a different repertoire might be created for the purpose of writing a different language. This is often assumed, for example, as the motivation behind the creation of the Cypriot Syllabic script of the 1st millennium BC, itself an adaptation of an earlier Cypriot (i.e. Cypro-Minoan) script: ‘one can suppose that [the Greek] language was the target of the adaptation’ in this case, according to Egetmeyer.¹⁹ However, scripts can be changed or developed for other reasons, and only direct linguistic evidence could confirm the presence of multiple languages on Cyprus in the Late Bronze Age – currently an unrealistic goal while the Cypro-Minoan inscriptions remain undeciphered. The epigraphic record in its current state of preservation gives only very limited scope for identifying morphological patterns, and we are left to rely on absence of evidence for a common language as a substitute for evidence of the presence of different languages (e.g. the fact that the CM2 tablets do not appear to have lexical overlap with other inscriptions, nor to share what may be morphological endings found in some CM1 inscriptions).²⁰

The archaeological record does not give clear evidence for two distinct population groups present at Enkomi at the time of the CM2 tablets, nor for ethnically distinct groups anywhere in Cyprus at this time. É. Masson’s proposal²¹ that Hurrian was one of the languages underlying Cypro-Minoan inscriptions has prompted a search for archaeological evidence of a Hurrian-speaking population, but without success.²² There is considerable evidence for Phoenician trading activity in Cyprus in the Late Bronze Age, and with it we may assume some level of Phoenician presence, although

¹⁸ É. Masson (1972) 100.

¹⁹ Egetmeyer (2013) 108.

²⁰ Steele (2013) 60–80.

²¹ E.g. É. Masson (1976).

²² See Knapp and Marchant (1982).

evidence for settled Phoenician-speaking groups is elusive at this stage.²³ Underlying such failures to identify linguistic groups in the material record is the problem that we cannot necessarily expect language to be reflected well in material remains,²⁴ a factor that has also caused some confusion, for example, when attempting to identify 1st-millennium ‘Eteocypriots’ archaeologically.²⁵ Indeed the general cultural homogeneity of 1st-millennium Cyprus itself suggests that we need not look for signs of cultural differentiation to match linguistic differentiation. Meanwhile, the balance of probability is also in favour of a multilingual situation in Late Bronze Age Cyprus, which would also be an expected outcome of the opening up of the island to Mediterranean trading networks from the end of the Middle Bronze Age onwards.²⁶

The transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age on Cyprus is usually estimated as falling in the 11th century BC. However, as Maria Iacovou has convincingly argued, this transition does not mark a break but is characterised by considerable cultural continuity.²⁷ Continuity is also evident in the epigraphic record, as syllabic inscriptions sometimes classed as Cypro-Minoan continue to be attested into the 10th century BC (Cypro-Geometric I–II). The development of a descendant script that was adapted directly from some form of Cypro-Minoan and went on to be used throughout most of the 1st millennium, the deciphered Cypriot Syllabary, further proves that there was no break in literacy at this time.²⁸ The unidentified language(s) of some of the Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions of the 1st millennium could be survivals of an earlier language or languages in use during the Late Bronze Age, although such a suggestion remains tentative. In spite of the continuities in writing and possibly also language use, however, the epigraphic record shows that the island’s linguistic composition changed at about this time as two new languages arrived on Cyprus in or by the Early Iron Age: Greek (in a variety that was to develop into the local Cypriot Greek dialect) and Phoenician (which also probably went on to develop with some distinct local features²⁹), whose earliest Cypriot inscriptions were discussed in [Chapter 2](#).

²³ See Boyes (2013) 176–8.

²⁴ See Ferrara (2013) 67–73: ‘A methodological warning would prompt us not to expect a different linguistic group to leave a visible imprint on the archaeological record, and indeed one cannot be equipped with tools to identify such an imprint, in the presence of an undeciphered script’ (p. 73).

²⁵ Compare Given (1998) and Steele (2011a).

²⁶ See further [Chapter 1](#) on the context of the beginnings of Cypriot literacy.

²⁷ E.g. Iacovou (2007).

²⁸ Sherratt (2003), Steele (2011b), Egetmeyer (2013) 107–8. See also [Chapter 2](#).

²⁹ The surviving inscriptions give only limited evidence pointing towards idiosyncrasies of Cypriot Phoenician, which might be linguistic/dialectal or orthographic: see Steele (2013) 188–201.

4.2.2 The 1st Millennium BC and the Age of the City Kingdoms

Between the first appearances of the local Greek dialect (11th/10th century BC) and the Phoenician language (9th century BC) on Cyprus and their disappearance from the epigraphic record in the Hellenistic period (3rd or 2nd century BC), the evidence points to both languages being spoken, or at least written, in a wide variety of locations around the island. The same is true to some extent of the inscriptions of unidentified language (i.e. non-Greek texts written in the Cypriot Syllabic script), although they survive in smaller numbers. Some caution must be exercised, however, when attempting to use the distribution of surviving inscriptions as evidence for the distribution of speakers of each language, because we cannot assume that the extant epigraphic record tells the whole story: it is impossible to know what is missing from our records simply because it did not survive antiquity, some of it perhaps on materials such as papyrus or parchment that is not durable enough to survive in an arid climate, while some may have been destroyed in other ways or may not yet been discovered. Moreover, writing is only a reflex of speech, and one that can be affected by restrictions of literacy and perceptions concerning the sorts of things that are usually or usually not written down. It is impossible simply to equate surviving numbers of inscriptions with the presence of relative speech communities. With this caveat in mind, we can consider what the surviving evidence does tell us about language use and potentially about language contact.

Of around 1,360 surviving inscriptions written in the Cypriot Syllabic script (in use between the 8th and 3rd centuries BC),³⁰ it is usually assumed that the majority are written in the local Greek dialect. However, a significant proportion of the inscriptions are too short or damaged to admit a positive identification as Greek language texts, and we must also discount the inscriptions written in an unidentified language,³¹ as well as the inscriptions found overseas that do not give direct evidence for speaker communities in Cyprus.³² This leaves, from a personal count at time of writing, 521 surviving

³⁰ See Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 for an inventory of currently known/published inscriptions. The project to publish a site-by-site corpus of Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions will improve the accuracy of such statistical evaluations as it appears volume by volume: see Egetmeyer, Karnava and Perna (2011), (2012).

³¹ I.e. inscriptions long or intact enough to be certain that they are not written in Greek: see [Chapter 3, section 3.3](#).

³² The exceptions are inscriptions found abroad that give an ethnic or city of origin for the author, as is common for example in some graffiti found in Egypt, and thus imply that the language of the inscription is in use at the named site: see [Chapter 5, section 5.2.2](#), on some of these.

inscriptions from Cyprus that we can identify beyond doubt as being written in the Cypriot Greek dialect.³³ The number of surviving inscriptions written in Phoenician is larger, some 945 at current count.³⁴ Again some are very short or damaged, but in this case it is generally assumed that any inscription written in the Phoenician script must also be written in the Phoenician language, because the script is not known to be used for other languages in this area or period. Map 4.1 shows the locations of finds of identified Cypriot Syllabic Greek, Cypriot Syllabic non-Greek (i.e. Eteocypriot or another unidentified language) and Phoenician inscriptions: a circle represents Cypriot Syllabic Greek (●), a sunburst Cypriot Syllabic non-Greek (☼) and a star Phoenician (☆), with size varying to represent varying numbers of surviving inscriptions in different areas (major sites only are labelled by name).

As can be seen from Map 4.1, there is considerable overlap in the distribution of the languages of 1st-millennium BC Cyprus, as attested in



Map 4.1 Distribution of Cypriot Syllabic Greek, Cypriot Syllabic non-Greek and Phoenician inscriptions.

³³ The number could be increased if we were to count every inscription that contains a whole or partial Greek name but otherwise preserves no identifiable linguistic features. However, since we know that Greek names can appear in non-Greek inscriptions (see Chapter 3, section 3.3), I have excluded these from the total.

³⁴ Steele (2013) 179 gives a table showing the chronological distribution of Cypriot Phoenician inscriptions, with the total number given as 549; the increased total of 945 is due to further finds from Idalion. Idalion is now the most prolific site for Phoenician inscriptions (733 inscriptions, of which 716 are from the recent discoveries of administrative inscriptions and have not yet been published: see Hadjicosti (1997) 57–8, Christou (1996) 1074, Hadjisavvas (1999) 612 for interim reports on the document types), with Kition second with 156 inscriptions (one of which is bilingual with alphabetic Greek; see Yon (2004), (2006)).

surviving inscriptions. Moreover, seven sites have inscriptions in all three categories (Cypriot Syllabic Greek, Cypriot Syllabic non-Greek and Phoenician): Paphos, Kourion, Amathus, Kition, Idalion, Golgoi and Salamis. As already mentioned, mapping spoken language onto the distribution of surviving inscriptions is an exercise that should be treated with considerable caution, but we can at least conclude that there were several locations on the island where the physical manifestations of multiple languages, i.e. inscriptions written in them, existed together. This casts new light on the ethnic/linguistic designations offered in Pseudo-Skylax's *Periplus* (see [section 4.1](#) above), where one city can be branded as 'Greek', 'Phoenician' or 'other', and suggests a more complex picture at least in terms of the written manifestations of language use.

One significant feature of the distribution of inscriptions is the association between particular languages and local administration, as we will see further in the discussions of individual sites below. A considerable proportion of surviving epigraphy concerns administration in one way or another, whether it is a monumental inscription commissioned by the local royal dynasty or an accounting document. The monumental inscriptions especially suggest a strong association between particular languages (in their visually distinctive written form) and the power structures of the Cypriot city kingdoms.³⁵ If a particular city kingdom adopted one particular language as its language of administration and public display, we might assume that this should imply that it was a location where the language was spoken, perhaps by some or most of the local populace. There are, however, numerous examples from the ancient world that indicate that this is not necessarily a safe assumption to make, where languages were adopted for local administrative purposes not because they were spoken locally, but rather because of their wider social or political importance. For example, Aramaic inscriptions became common in many areas of the Achaemenid Persian empire of the 6th to 4th centuries BC, not because Aramaic was spoken by locals, but because the language was the one most commonly used in Persian administration; the picture is further complicated by the fact that Aramaic was not originally the language of the Persians either, although its use in imperial bureaucracy clearly affected Persian language use over time. For example, it is its status as an official administrative language that explains the presence of Aramaic in a trilingual inscription from Xanthos in Lycia (southern Anatolia) alongside two languages in local use, Lycian and Greek, with corresponding differences in the content of the three versions of the text: for example, while the Lycian

³⁵ See Iacovou ([2013a](#)).

and Greek are very similar in content, the Aramaic is shorter, but is also the only version to give an official date for the decree.³⁶

Another intriguing example of unexpected language use is the attestation of Phoenician during the 8th and 7th centuries BC in Cilicia, an area of southern Anatolia quite close to Cyprus, and one not closely associated with Phoenician cultural activity. Two bilingual inscriptions have been found at the sites of Karatepe and Çineköy, both presenting records of the local ruling dynasty in Luwian (written in the Hieroglyphic Luwian script) and Phoenician.³⁷ Luwian was certainly a local language, closely related to another Anatolian language, Hittite, as well as to others such as Lycian and Carian. On an assumption that Luwian must therefore have been the usual spoken language in the area, most discussions of these texts have supposed that the inscriptions were first composed in Luwian and then translated into Phoenician, the latter acting as a more widely used *lingua franca* in the Assyrian empire at this time.³⁸ However, study of the Luwian and Phoenician versions of these inscriptions has demonstrated quite convincingly that Phoenician is their primary language, i.e. that they were composed first in Phoenician and then translated into Luwian, rather than the other way round.³⁹ This makes it difficult to reconstruct what language or languages were spoken locally. Was Phoenician spoken by the local population and/or ruling dynasty? Or did they speak Luwian, but choose to commission the texts in Phoenician for another reason, for example as an expression of independence from other Anatolian states that used Luwian as their administrative language?⁴⁰ A socio-cultural explanation like the latter perhaps seems more likely given that there is very little evidence to point towards Phoenician as a language in use in the area.

Bearing in mind examples such as those in the last two paragraphs, we must be cautious in assuming that the language of local administration was also widely spoken by the inhabitants of a Cypriot city kingdom. Even if the language was spoken, this does not mean that it was the only language spoken locally, or even necessarily that it was the local language of most of the populace, and/or of local elites. For example, after Idalion passed from Greek to Phoenician hands in the 5th century BC, we have

³⁶ The inscription is published in Metzger (1979), Rhodes and Osborne (2003) no. 78.

³⁷ Hawkins and Çambel (2000) 45–68 (Karatepe 1), Tekoglu and Lemaire (2000).

³⁸ E.g. Payne (2006) 130, Lanfranchi (2007) 186.

³⁹ Yakubovich (2015).

⁴⁰ This suggestion was made by Yakubovich in an oral presentation; the publication of his argument, however, suggests another alternative: that it was Greek settlers in the area who chose to use Phoenician to distinguish themselves from local Luwians, a suggestion tied in to apparent reference to the Greek legendary figure Mopsus in the inscriptions. See Yakubovich (2015).

good evidence that Phoenician was used as a primary language of local administration, but should we assume that it became a more widely spoken language in the city at the same time? Or is it more likely that Greek continued to be the dominant language among the local populace, but became less visible to us because it is mostly administrative (and therefore Phoenician) inscriptions that have survived from this time? One way of thinking about such issues is to consider the distribution and type of surviving epigraphy at various Cypriot sites, which allows some insight into the functional range of inscriptions in different languages when they are attested in the same location. The cities discussed below, case-by-case, are all ones at which inscriptions in more than one language have been found.⁴¹

Amathus

Coins in Greek and Eteocypriot. Inscriptions: 3 Greek, 14 Eteocypriot, 2 other unidentified non-Greek syllabic, 5 Phoenician, 4 bilinguals in Eteocypriot and (Koine/alphabetic) Greek.

The city of Amathus was marked out by some non-Cypriot writers as being somewhat different from the island's other cities. We have already seen that the *Periplus* of Pseudo-Skylax, in its description of Cyprus, calls the city's inhabitants 'autochthonous' (Ps.-Skylax 103). This may relate to a myth that the Amathusians were descended from Kinyras, a native Cypriot king who according to Homer promised aid to the Greeks in the Trojan War (*Iliad* 11.20–3),⁴² an association claimed by some later historians (Theopompus of Chios, *Philippica* 115 F 103; Stephanus of Byzantium, s.v. Amathus). This is in contrast to legends relating to other Cypriot cities, which were often believed to be founded by Greeks returning from the Trojan War (the *nostoi*).⁴³ These peculiar views of Amathus perhaps also reflected some knowledge of the use there of a non-Greek language, which we label today as Eteocypriot (on the evidence for the language, see [Chapter 3, section 3.3](#)). If we are correct to make a link between these outside views and language use at Amathus, then the reference in Psuedo-Skylax to autochthony could be taken to suggest that the Eteocypriot language was

⁴¹ Aside from the sites discussed here, the other sites that have produced inscriptions in different languages are: Chytroi (21 Greek, 1 Phoenician), Keryneia (1 Greek, 1 non-Greek), Kourion (26 Greek, 4 non-Greek of which one perhaps Eteocypriot, 4 Phoenician; coins in Greek), Salamis (7 Greek, 3 non-Greek, 10 Phoenician; coins in Greek), Tamassos (2 Greek, 1 non-Greek, 2 Phoenician, 2 bilinguals in Phoenician and Greek) and Vouni (4 Greek, 1 Phoenician).

⁴² The legends of Kinyras are treated at length in Franklin (2016).

⁴³ See Baurain (1984), Petit (1995). For a consideration of the relevance of foundation myths to politics and identity, see MacSweeney (2013) on ancient Ionia.

perceived (perhaps correctly?) as a survival from the days before Greeks settled on the island.⁴⁴

All the known kings of Amathus have Greek names, with the dynasty reconstructed primarily from coinage. The proliferation of identifiable Greek names in Eteocypriot-language inscriptions, however, probably indicates that names of Greek origin had for a long time been adopted by local Eteocypriot speakers. This means that we do not have to assume, just because the local kings had Greek names, that they were also Greek speakers, or that they were not Eteocypriot speakers. In fact, one of the kings of Amathus commissioned coins with an inscription that we can identify as being written in Eteocypriot rather than Greek language because of its morphology: it reads *pu-ru-wo-so*, ‘of Purwos’.⁴⁵ Purwos is a Greek name, and if it were inscribed on a coin with Greek inflection, like most of the other known Cypriot coins, it should read *pu-ru-wo*; the form *pu-ru-wo-so* does not correspond with any valid Greek form of the name. The ending in *-so*, however, is a known Eteocypriot form and so we can conclude that this is an Eteocypriot language inscription. Most of the other attested coins of Amathus with full inscriptions bear the Greek pattern, with a Greek-looking ending in *-ō*, for example *wo-ro-i-ko* and *zo-ti-mo*, while one has only an abbreviated form of the king’s name *ro* and its language therefore cannot be identified as either Greek or Eteocypriot.⁴⁶ This could suggest that for the most part the local administration followed the customs used across the rest of the island when it came to coinage, which might have been advantageous when trading within the island but more likely was simply a perceived island-wide standard. The king Purwos, however, apparently disrupted this convention by issuing a coin with an Eteocypriot language inscription.

Of the other inscriptions, those written in Cypriot Syllabic Greek and Phoenician are confined almost completely to texts appearing on ceramic sherds. This is also the case for the small number of inscriptions in the Greek alphabet, with the exception of a gravestone dated to the 5th century BC that bears an epitaph of a man from Halicarnassus, a non-Amathusian and non-Cypriot.⁴⁷ The surviving Eteocypriot inscriptions, however, are

⁴⁴ The label ‘Eteocypriot’, a modern one originating from the work of Friedrich (1932), itself means ‘original Cypriot’ and so makes a similar assumption concerning the origins of the language. It was coined by analogy with the term ‘Eteocretan’, which was used in the ancient period to refer to a non-Greek contingent in Crete.

⁴⁵ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Amathus 20.

⁴⁶ On the coinage of Amathus, see Picard (1991) and Amandry (1984), (1997).

⁴⁷ See further Steele (2013) 160–7.

more consistently written on durable media: a number are on stone monuments, some funerary and others of a public/political nature, including a colossal stone vase from the acropolis (see also [Chapter 5, section 3.3.3](#)). The distribution of languages and their inscription types is striking, and while the epigraphic record is limited, what has survived suggests that it was Eteocypriot, rather than Greek or Phoenician, that was being used for monumental and public inscriptions locally. Most important from an administrative point of view are the bilingual inscriptions of the 4th century issued by the city's inhabitants or its royal dynasty, which were also found in the acropolis, occupying a central position in Amathusian political geography. Although they make use of the Greek alphabet and language in its pan-Mediterranean Koine form, they give pride of place to text written in Eteocypriot in the Cypriot Syllabic script (see below, [section 4.3 s.v. Amathus](#)).

The epigraphic record suggests that speakers of multiple languages may have been present in ancient Amathus, but it is particularly the Eteocypriot language that seems to have been associated with prestige and local political functions. The role of the Greek language at Amathus must have changed over time: Greek names probably entered the Eteocypriot onomastic tradition at an early stage, suggesting early contact, but the role of the Eteocypriot language in the city does not as far as we can tell seem to have been affected by this; by the late 4th century BC, however, the Mediterranean-wide Greek Koine and alphabet was beginning to appear alongside Eteocypriot in public spaces, paving the way for it to take over completely as the language of official documents in the following century under the new Ptolemaic regime (see further Chapter 5).

Golgoi

Inscriptions: 26 Greek, 11 non-Greek syllabic, 2 Phoenician, 2 Greek but with some Phoenician signs.

Golgoi is the other location on Cyprus, aside from Amathus, that preserves non-Greek Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions in significant numbers: these non-Greek texts do not preserve consistent sets of features that allow us to confirm even whether they are all written in the same language, and although they do not seem to share any known features with the better-understood language labelled Eteocypriot, it is impossible to be certain whether they might constitute a separate linguistic group (discussed in more detail in [Chapter 3, section 3.3](#)). On the grounds of context and probability, they have been suggested to provide evidence of a possible further language, hypothetically another potential survivor of an

unidentified Late Bronze Age language of Cyprus.⁴⁸ While the language remains mysterious, the context of the inscriptions is better understood because, like the majority of inscriptions from the site, the Golgoi texts are from locations associated with religious activity. Alongside similar texts in Cypriot Syllabic Greek, the non-Greek texts from Golgoi often appear on items such as relief sculptures related to the sanctuaries, and we can infer that they relate to local religious activity.

The two Phoenician-only inscriptions are not attributed to Golgoi with certainty.⁴⁹ However, there are two accounting documents from the site that are written primarily in Cypriot Syllabic Greek but have some Phoenician letters added to the inscription in what is probably another hand.⁵⁰ The texts are damaged, making it difficult to understand their content, beyond some references to measurement and prices, and to interpret the presence of these Phoenician signs. One is a limestone plaque of the early 5th century BC, sufficiently damaged that the only words recognised with certainty are Greek names; it appears to have the Phoenician letter *waw* in four lines, and perhaps also a Phoenician letter *zayin* in another (although this last might also be interpreted as a Cypriot Syllabic *we*, which has a similar shape).⁵¹ The second is also an accounting document, written on an ostrakon predominantly in the Cypriot Syllabary and again quite damaged (with just two possible Greek anthroponyms identifiable). In this case the signs that may be Phoenician letters (*shin* and perhaps *taw*) appear at the end of lines, as does a probable further Cypriot Syllabic sign.⁵² These inscriptions are difficult to interpret and the Phoenician nature of some of the signs appearing in them is not completely assured. Nevertheless, they could suggest an economic or accounting process (perhaps on the part of local or travelling merchants?) that involved input from two different languages/scripts, for example a situation in which a document written in Cypriot Syllabic Greek might have been checked or amended by a Phoenician speaker writing in their own script.⁵³ If so, this would also suggest that the Phoenician speaker in question was able to read the Cypriot Syllabary and perhaps understand Greek, and that there was some degree of bilingualism and biliteracy on the part of the individuals involved.

⁴⁸ Egetmeyer (2012).

⁴⁹ See O. Masson and Sznycer (1972) 113–14.

⁵⁰ O. Masson (1961/83) no. 299 and O. Masson (1989) no. 1; Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Golgoi 40 and 56. The presence of another hand is, however, difficult to judge given that sign shapes in two different writing systems cannot be compared with each other.

⁵¹ See Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 622–3 (Golgoi 40).

⁵² See Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 626 (Golgoi 56).

⁵³ See O. Masson (1990).

Idalion

Coins in Greek. Inscriptions: 9 Greek, 1 non-Greek, 733 Phoenician, 1 bilingual in Phoenician and Greek.

The very large number of Phoenician inscriptions at Idalion is dominated by substantial finds in the late 20th and early 21st century of administrative inscriptions written on small pieces of marble and sherds of pottery.⁵⁴ Of the 17 Phoenician inscriptions that do not belong to this category, some belong to a religious context, originating from the sanctuary of Athena,⁵⁵ and the bilingual inscription is also religious in nature, set up by a Phoenician prince to Reshep/Apollo (see [section 4.3](#) s.v. Idalion). Idalion has furthermore produced the most famous (and longest) of all Greek Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions, the Idalion Bronze, which records an attack on the (Greek-administered) city by Medes and Kitians and commonly appears at the centre of discussions of ethnic antagonism between Greeks and Phoenicians on Cyprus, as was discussed above ([section 4.1](#)).⁵⁶ Cypriot Syllabic Greek administrative documents on pottery sherds have also been found;⁵⁷ these and the Phoenician parallels can be seen to point towards Idalion's economic importance as a site close to the industrial and mining area of Cyprus.

Our understanding of the linguistic composition of Idalion can be informed in part by historical information for the site's administration. Idalion is one of the Cypriot city kingdoms listed in the Assyrian Prism of Esarhaddon of the early 7th century BC, with its king listed as bearing the Greek name Akestor (*Ekishtura*).⁵⁸ This is our earliest reference to Idalion having a Greek-named king, and the continuation of a Greek administration there is confirmed by Cypriot Syllabic inscribed coinage of the first half of the 5th century BC. The coins unusually sometimes bear the city's name alone (as *e-ta-li*), and sometimes have an abbreviation for a king's name. However, we know that the city changed hands: from the mid-5th century BC onwards, Idalion was incorporated into the territory controlled by Kition, whose kings are then titled as 'king of Kition and Idalion' (and for some period 'king of Kition, Idalion and Tamassos').⁵⁹

⁵⁴ These documents are not yet published. See Hadjicosti (1997) for some preliminary information, and an image of one of the inscriptions (p. 59).

⁵⁵ See O. Masson and Szyner (1972) 108–13.

⁵⁶ The Idalion Bronze is Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Idalion 1. See Egetmeyer (2004) further on the inscription.

⁵⁷ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Idalion 20–4.

⁵⁸ See O. Masson (1992).

⁵⁹ On the Phoenician appropriation of Idalion in the context of the general Phoenician presence on Cyprus, see Michaelidou-Nicolaou (1987) 335; see also Tuplin (1996) 45, 78 and Satraki (2010) 204–5, 207–8.

The change of administration is also reflected in material remains in the construction of a Phoenician administrative centre on the foundations of the old palatial complex, and the discovery there of archives of Phoenician administrative texts.⁶⁰ The presence of texts in different languages may be partially indicative of the presence of communities speaking those languages throughout Idalion's history, but for the most part surviving inscriptions have arisen from contexts too closely related to ruling dynasties or administrative processes to reveal much about language use on the part of the general population. Even the bilingual inscription, despite being a religious dedication, has to be understood as a public declaration of a member of the Phoenician ruling dynasty after the city came under Phoenician rule (see [section 4.3](#) s.v. Idalion). However, one lasting testament to contact between the two languages is perhaps to be found in a Greek alphabetic ostrakon dated to c.300, giving a list of some of the city's gates. One has a Greek name, but the other two have Phoenician names transliterated into the Greek alphabet, suggestive both of a period of Phoenician administration when the gates were given their names, and of the use of these Phoenician names for the gates by local Greek speakers.⁶¹

Kition

Coins in Phoenician. Inscriptions: 3 Greek, 2 non-Greek, 155 Phoenician, 1 bilingual in (alphabetic) Greek and Phoenician.

The epigraphic record of Kition is dominated by Phoenician inscriptions, which is unsurprising given its longstanding history as a centre of Phoenician administration.⁶² It has been argued that there may have been a Phoenician presence at the city from as early as the 12th or 11th century BC,⁶³ and although this cannot be proven we can at least question the traditional narrative that sees the arrival of Phoenicians at the city (which was a 13th century foundation, so a pre-existing settlement) as a focused colonial episode with an overt political motivation.⁶⁴ The earliest secure evidence for Phoenician settlement is usually considered to be the Phoenician-style temple complex built in the 9th century BC. Whenever the Phoenician-speaking administration of the city began, it is not until the 5th century BC that we begin to have direct evidence for the Phoenician royal dynasty of Kition through coinage and other inscriptions.

⁶⁰ Hadjicosti (1997).

⁶¹ See Stager, Walker and Wright (1974) 78–9 and Steele (2013) 214.

⁶² See Yon (1987), (1992), (1997).

⁶³ Iacovou (2012) 220.

⁶⁴ Iacovou (2014b).

The surviving Phoenician inscriptions found at Kition are diverse in nature, and include religious and funerary texts, texts on pottery/ostraca and accounting documents as well as official and monumental inscriptions.⁶⁵ The implied wide range of uses of writing at the site would conform with the expected presence of a Phoenician-speaking population.⁶⁶ The only surviving bilingual inscription is a funerary monument erected for a Greek man from Xanthos in Anatolia, and so is not indicative of local language contact; its Phoenician text is short and takes up only a small portion of the bottom of the stele (see [section 4.3](#) s.v. Kition). There are also two non-Greek inscriptions in unidentified language that are very early, and are among the earliest surviving inscriptions written in the Cypriot Syllabary, dating to the end of the 8th century BC. It could be hypothesised that these texts point towards the existence of an earlier language, perhaps one spoken during the Late Bronze Age, still in use in Kition during the earlier stage of the Phoenician presence at the site.

The three other Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions also deserve comment. One is a damaged inscription on a pottery vessel whose provenance is not certain but that has a satisfactory Greek interpretation.⁶⁷ The other two, however, are identical amphora stamps, both reading simply *ke-ti*, assumed to correspond to ‘From Kition’ or ‘Of the Kitians’ in Greek, presumably in abbreviated form since the word seems to be lacking any recognisable Greek ending.⁶⁸ However, one might validly wonder whether this is not Greek but Phoenician, transliterated into the Cypriot Syllabary: we cannot confirm the vocalisation since the Phoenician script does not record vowels, but otherwise *ke-ti* would correspond well to the usual recorded Phoenician name of Kition, *KTY*.

Lapethos

Coins in Phoenician and alphabetic Greek. Inscriptions: none, but the nearby religious site of Larnax tes Lapethou has produced 2 Phoenician inscriptions and 1 bilingual in Phoenician and alphabetic Greek.

Despite its sparse epigraphic record, the city of Lapethos deserves mention here concerning its linguistic affiliations. The Larnax tes Lapethou inscriptions, discovered at a nearby religious site, give some detailed information about individuals involved in the Phoenician administration of Lapethos, the existence of which is corroborated by the Phoenician-

⁶⁵ See [Yon \(2004\)](#).

⁶⁶ See also [Steele \(2013\)](#) 225–31.

⁶⁷ [Egetmeyer \(2010a\)](#) vol. 2 Kition 5.

⁶⁸ [Egetmeyer \(2010a\)](#) vol. 2 Kition 1 and 9, and see vol. 1 pp. 68–70 (§43).

inscribed coins attributed to the city. Due to some oddities in the Larnax tes Lapethou inscriptions, it has been suggested that the Phoenicians who settled there were not from Tyre but from Byblos, representing a settlement by a different group from the Tyrian Phoenicians who came to settle at Kition;⁶⁹ the evidence for dialectal forms in the inscriptions, however, is questionable and a Byblian origin for these Phoenicians can be questioned.⁷⁰ What looks like a reference to Byblos or a Byblian deity in a 4th-century inscription from Larnax tes Lapethou (*W'GBL*, 'and to [the god of] Byblos'⁷¹) need not be taken as evidence that the city was originally settled by Byblian Phoenicians, but could point towards some later contact between Byblos and Lapethos.⁷² Nevertheless, there is no evidence at all for any links or relationship between the Phoenician administrations at Lapethos and Kition, the former on the island's north coast and the latter on the south-east, and they can be assumed to be entirely independent of each other.

Even though the evidence points towards a longstanding Phoenician administration at Lapethos, some of the city's kings are recorded as having Greek names. One of the Larnax tes Lapethou inscriptions attests a king named *DMWNKS*, which has usually been understood as corresponding to the Greek name *Dēmonikos*.⁷³ If this represents the name *Dēmonikos* (or rather *Dāmonikos*, without Attic-Ionic *ā > ē*), however, then the Phoenician consonantal letter *wau* (*W*) in the middle of the name would here be used, unusually, as a *mater lectionis* for an *o*-vowel in the middle of the word. Lipiński has suggested an alternative interpretation, as the Greek name *Dāmōnax* or *Dēmōnax*,⁷⁴ comprising the elements *dāmos* and *wanax*, both well attested in the Cypriot Greek onomastic record.⁷⁵ Rather than the contracted form *Dāmōnax*, however, we should see this as an uncontracted form *Dāmowanax*,⁷⁶ preserving the intervocalic /w/ phoneme that remained present at least in writing in Cypriot Greek until a very late stage (although increasing numbers of omissions and hypercorrections demonstrate the sound's weakness⁷⁷). This makes more sense from an orthographic point of view, since the Phoenician *wau* in the middle of the name does not represent

⁶⁹ Lane (1969).

⁷⁰ See Steele (2013) 189–95.

⁷¹ Honeyman (1938), Steele (2013) no. Ph 9.

⁷² Abou Abdallah (2010).

⁷³ E.g. Honeyman (1938), O. Masson and Szyner (1972) 98, Greenfield (1987).

⁷⁴ Lipiński (2004) 81.

⁷⁵ Egetmeyer 2010a vol. 1 §370 (*dāmos*), §402 (*wanax*).

⁷⁶ Here Phoenician *DMWNKS* would represent only consonants.

⁷⁷ See Morpurgo Davies (1988).

a *mater lectionis* for a vowel and instead has its normal consonantal value. The fact that some coins omit the *wau* and spell this name as simply *DMNKS* can be explained as a reflex of the /w/ phoneme's weakness, arising in a contracted form of the name from *Dāmowanax* > *Dāmoanax* > *Dāmōnax*.⁷⁸ The name *Dāmowanax* is entirely consistent with Cypriot Greek onomastic traditions, and also with Cypriot Greek royal terminology given that in Cyprus the term *wanax* was still used to refer to a member of a royal dynasty ('prince', *vel sim.*), which could point towards this king himself being a Greek speaker or perhaps towards him being a Phoenician speaker who has taken on or been given a Greek name in keeping with local tradition. The latter interpretation would make sense from a cultural point of view, given that a similar phenomenon is seen in the Idalion Bilingual (see section 4.3 s.v. Idalion) where Lord Baalrom (a member of the Phoenician ruling dynasty in place in the city at this time) is given the title *wanax* in the Greek half of the inscription.

As well as one or more kings with the name *Dāmowanax*, another probable Greek name for a king of Lapethos can be found in a coin referring to 'NDR, which is likely to correspond to a Greek name with the element Andro-, perhaps in a shortened form such as Andros although the final -s is not represented in the coin.⁷⁹ Both these names are written in the Phoenician script on the city's coins. There were also some kings of Lapethos who are recorded as having Phoenician names, two on coins (*Sidqimilk* and *Baalzakor*), and one in an inscription from *Larnax tes Lapethou* (*Berekshemesh*).⁸⁰ One of the kings named *Dāmowanax* (*Dāmowanax* II or perhaps a third king with the same name?) issued a coin in the early 4th century BC with his name and title abbreviated in Greek alphabetic letters, a practice that was also observed by the last known king of the city, again bearing a Greek name, *Praxippos*. It is impossible to be certain whether the Greek-named kings and Phoenician-named kings of Lapethos belonged to the same dynasty or not. Assumptions that individuals with names from

⁷⁸ The question of whether there was more than one king of Lapethos named *Dāmowanax*, as represented in the *Larnax tes Lapethou* inscription and in coins, remains open: see e.g. Greenfield (1987), Lipiński (2004) 86. The possibility that a single king's name was written as both *DMWNKS* and *DMNKS*, however, would not in itself be problematic: compare the *Amathus Bilingual* (see section 4.3 s.v. Amathus as well as Chapter 3, section 3.3), where the same individual is spelt as both *a-ra-to-wa-na-ka-so-ko-o-se* (with /w/ written) in the Cypriot Syllabary and *Aristōnax* (without /w/ written and with the final stage of contraction represented) in the Greek alphabet.

⁷⁹ Masson and Sznycer (1972) 100. Note that the *mater lectionis* used here (*aleph* for a Greek a-vowel) is a much more common one than the use of *wau* in such a way, making the interpretation more likely.

⁸⁰ See Robinson (1948), O. Masson and Sznycer (1972) 97–100, Greenfield (1987), Destrooper-Georgiades (2011).

different linguistic traditions must also have different political allegiances, and could not belong to the same family, could be oversimplified.⁸¹ One feature that might weigh against such assumptions is the practice of assuming a ‘double name’ or ‘equivalent name’ from a different onomastic tradition, which is well known on Cyprus and is attested at Larnax tes Lapethou itself in the surviving bilingual inscription dating from the Ptolemaic period.⁸²

The archaeological record of the city further complicates the picture in showing evidence for predominantly Greek cultural influence,⁸³ where we can tell, while ancient sources are divided over its ethnic affiliations: in Pseudo-Skylax’s *Periplus* (quoted in [section 4.1](#) above) Lapethos is described as Phoenician, but for Strabo it is a Greek foundation.⁸⁴ Although the epigraphic record of this site is too sparse to tell us anything useful about the linguistic composition of its population, the mixture of Greek royal names and Phoenician official inscriptions is remarkable and must affect our understanding of the city’s history as either, more traditionally, a disputed seat of Phoenician and Greek dynasties, or, probably more plausibly, a place where the local ruling family/families may have used the Phoenician language for official inscriptions but were affected by cultural interchanges and onomastic flexibility.

Marion

Coins: some Greek, two issues bilingual and digraphic in Cypriot Syllabic Greek and Phoenician. Inscriptions: 90 Greek (of which one digraphic in Cypriot Syllabic and alphabetic Greek), 1 possible Eteocypriot.

The location of the ancient city of Marion is known only approximately, and any certain material remains of its political centre have yet to be found. Diodorus tells us that Marion was razed to the ground by Ptolemy Soter in the late 4th century BC (19.79.4), and it is possible that this event is responsible for the dearth of evidence on the ground for political activity. However, the region surrounding modern Polis in the western part of Cyprus has been identified as the territory of the ancient kingdom, with some limited domestic remains and slightly better evidence for local religious practice in sanctuaries.⁸⁵ A relatively large number of Cypriot Syllabic Greek inscriptions are attributed to this area, making ancient

⁸¹ E.g. Robinson (1948) 61, Greenfield (1987) 393. See also Lipiński (2004) 80–7.

⁸² See Steele (2013) 207–8, 214–25.

⁸³ Maier (1985) 35.

⁸⁴ Pseudo-Skylax 103, Strabo xiv 682c.

⁸⁵ See Childs (1997).

Marion the most prolific site in Cyprus for Greek Cypriot Syllabic texts if we count only those identified with absolute certainty as Greek.

It is assumed that Marion was under Greek administration, which is corroborated by some epigraphic evidence such as an inscribed stone block found near Limni bearing the name of King Timocharis in Cypriot Syllabic Greek; the same king or one bearing the same name is also attested on coinage attributed to Marion, one of which records him specifically as *pa-si-le-wo-se ti-mo-ka-ri-wo-se ma-ri-e-u-se* ('King Timocharis of Marion').⁸⁶ However, most inscriptions are private or funerary in nature and tell us little about the local administration, although they do point towards a considerable local population of Cypriot Greek speakers using the syllabic script. There is also one digraphic inscription, a grave stele with *κασιγνήτας* written sinistroversely in the Greek alphabet on the front, with a parallel Cypriot Syllabic text (*ka-si-ke-ne-ta*) written in a column down the side.⁸⁷ Dating to the 6th century BC, this is a very early example of a digraphic syllabic/alphabetic text (discussed in more detail in [Chapter 5](#)). Not counting short/damaged inscriptions, the only other text of interest from a linguistic point of view is an inscription on the base of an Attic vase that reads *ma-to-ti* or *ma-to-?-ti*, which seems to record a known Eteocypriot ending in *-o-ti*; however, the last one or two signs of the inscription is/are difficult to interpret and it should be considered an uncertain example.

The coins attributed to Marion are the primary evidence for Greek administration at the site. However, although no other Phoenician inscription has been found in the area of ancient Marion, the existence of two bilingual coins in Greek and Phoenician suggests that there may have been a period during which the city was home to a Phoenician administration, or at least one where Phoenician may have been used as an official language. The coins, dated between 470 and 450 BC, both record the king's name in Greek in the Cypriot Syllabary: *Sasmas* (a Phoenician name) son of *Doxandros* (a Greek name) of Marion. The Phoenician letters are confined to the reverse of the coins and read only *ML*, perhaps better interpreted as the Phoenician name for the city than as an abbreviated form of the Phoenician word for 'king', *MLK*.⁸⁸ After this issue, the kings of Marion have Greek names and use only Greek legends, mostly in the Cypriot Syllabary alone (*Stasiwoikos I* and *Timocharis*) and later digraphic

⁸⁶ O. Masson (1961/83) no. 172a, 170d.

⁸⁷ O. Masson (1961/83) no. 164. See also Jeffrey (1990) 346, 352.

⁸⁸ O. Masson (1961/83) no. 168. See Babelon (1910) vol. 2.2 #1367. O. Masson and Sznycer (1972) 81, however, prefer the latter interpretation of the Phoenician letters as an abbreviation for *MLK* 'king'. See also Apostolides (2004).

in the Cypriot Syllabary and Greek alphabet (Stasioikos II).⁸⁹ The last coins issued by Marion probably date to shortly before its destruction under Ptolemy in the late 4th century.

Paphos

Coins in Greek. Inscriptions: 86 Greek (or 91 if Nea Paphos is also counted), 3 Eteocypriot, 8 other non-Greek, 7 Phoenician.

Paphos stands out as a centre of Cypriot Greek political power *par excellence*, with a considerable number of Greek official inscriptions as well as information from coinage and elsewhere concerning several known kings of Paphos. Already in the 7th century BC, a pair of gold bracelets found at Kourion record the name of Eteandros, king of Paphos, the first surviving example by any Cypriot king of the use of the Cypriot Syllabary.⁹⁰ Outside of Cyprus, the same king is recorded in the contemporary Assyrian cuneiform inscribed Prism of Esarhaddon found at Nineveh, which lists ten Cypriot kings paying tribute including one named as *i-tu-u-an-da-ar* (~ Eteandros) king of *pa-ap-pa* (~ Paphos).⁹¹ A further find, also from Kourion and dated probably to the 7th century as well, records Akestor, perhaps king of Paphos.⁹² From these earliest attestations of the Cypriot Greek dynasty of Paphos, down to the final ones culminating in the last king of the independent kingdom, Nicocles, it is possible to piece together a list of at least 16 known kings, all of whom have Greek names.⁹³

Of the surviving inscriptions of Paphos, there are 86 whose identification as Greek is beyond doubt, and another 43 (most of which record partial Greek names) that are probable or possible Greek language inscriptions, by personal count. There are many others that are too brief, fragmentary or damaged to discern their language. The presence of a few Paphian inscriptions written in other languages could point towards a cosmopolitan site where speakers of different languages had settled or were regular visitors. Of the non-Greek syllabic inscriptions, the three with confirmed Eteocypriot features all date to the late 6th century BC,⁹⁴ two belonging to a religious context where they directly parallel Greek dedications (see [Chapter 3, section 3.3](#)). Of the Phoenician inscriptions, one that constitutes a religious dedication is remarkable since it is dedicated to ‘ŠTRT PP,

⁸⁹ O. Masson (1961/83) nos. 169, 170, 171. Markou (2006) 44–6 doubts the attribution of some digraphic coin issues to Marion.

⁹⁰ O. Masson (1961/83) no. 176.

⁹¹ A convenient transcription of the relevant Cypriot part is found in Yon (2004) no. 39.

⁹² O. Masson (1961/83) no. 180a.

⁹³ See Satraki (2010) 200–2.

⁹⁴ Steele (2013) 116: nos. EC 19, 20, 21.

probably ‘Astarte of Paphos’, an exact equivalent of the Greek *Aphrodite Paphia*, suggesting that Phoenician speakers were worshipping alongside Greek speakers at the Kouklia sanctuary site in the 3rd century BC, the period from which the inscription dates.⁹⁵ Relatively late Phoenician activity in the area is also indicated by a graffito found in one of the tombs of Nea Paphos, dated to c.300 BC.⁹⁶ It is striking that, beyond the dominant use of Greek at Paphos in a variety of inscription types, other languages were able to be written in some of the same contexts in which Greek was recorded, indicating that the use of other languages was not restricted, especially in the religious sphere.

The sites discussed in this section have demonstrated some of the problems with trying to map the use of languages in ancient Cyprus based primarily on surviving epigraphy alongside occasional external and historical testaments. It is possible to piece together information that attests to the fragmented political geography of the island, with individual city states using language and script in deliberate ways when they issued official monuments and coinage. We can also see that there is a large body of epigraphic material that has little to do with administration and tells us more about the choices that people were making on a day-to-day basis when they wanted to write their names on pots, or set up funerary inscriptions.

The sites chosen were the ones that have preserved sufficient evidence to show that the picture is in some way complicated, although again this varies from site to site. The situations of ancient Amathus, Kition and Paphos look reasonably straightforward in attesting the use of a local language of prestige and/or administration (Eteocypriot, Phoenician and Cypriot Greek respectively) while small numbers of texts in other languages point towards the co-existence of other linguistic groups but make only a limited mark on the surviving epigraphic record. Meanwhile, the apparent contrasts and/or fluctuations seen between languages and scripts used, onomastic traditions and sometimes expected language use at sites such as Lapethos and Marion are difficult to resolve completely. The case of Idalion stands out as one that can be tied quite closely to historical events that are known to us primarily from the epigraphic record itself, with language and script use responding to a change in administration from Greek to Phoenician in the 5th century BC. The only site discussed above that was not a political centre is Golgoi, a

⁹⁵ O. Masson and Szzymer (1972) 81–6.

⁹⁶ Michaelides and Szzymer (1985).

sanctuary site that was selected for the evidence for varying language use in both religious and economic activity.

At all of the sites mentioned, there must have been some element of contact between languages, or between speakers of different languages, in order to give us the variegated pictures of language use as attested in the epigraphic record. This is one way of identifying where the use of different languages may have overlapped or shifted over time. In one sense we are seeing a kind of multilingualism, i.e. points of contact between different languages or their speakers, if not evidence for speakers who are proficient in multiple languages. We can also consider inscriptions where the author has made a deliberate choice to put two languages side-by-side, which will be addressed in the [next section](#).

4.3 Bilingual Inscriptions

A small number of inscriptions from the 1st millennium BC give direct evidence for language contact in Cyprus during the age of the city kingdoms and into the Ptolemaic period. These include not only explicitly bilingual and digraphic (i.e. two different scripts as well as languages) inscriptions with versions in two different languages, but also some digraphic texts whose exact content is difficult to recover but that suggest likely input from two different languages into a single inscription. In the case of inscriptions incorporating both Greek and Phoenician language text, digraphia is inevitable because each language uses a different script: Phoenician its own consonantal alphabet and Greek either the local syllabic script or, as in two examples, the alphabet that was used in other Greek-speaking areas abroad. These bilinguals always keep each half of the text physically and visibly separate. The bilingual inscriptions in Eteocypriot and Greek are almost certainly all of the same type: both bilingual and digraphic, with the Greek part written not in the local dialect and script but in the international Koine variety of Greek and the alphabet associated with it, while Eteocypriot uses the local syllabary. The visibility of bilingual and digraphic inscriptions, even perhaps to the illiterate who would still be able to perceive the use of two different written forms, appears to be an important aspect of the written manifestation of language contact in ancient Cyprus.

The study of multilingualism in the ancient world has become a popular area of research in recent years, and has much enriched our understanding of linguistic interrelations and sociolinguistic factors affecting contact phenomena. The evidence for contact varies a great deal from place to place depending on the types of evidence that have survived. For the Latin

language, for example, the survival of large amounts of literary, epistolary and epigraphic material has allowed analysis of a broad range of multilingual phenomena, from intentional public display of visibly multilingual texts ('explicit bilingual' or 'biversion bilingual' texts) to slips, both accidental (interference) and intentional (code-switching), from one language into another by a speaker proficient in more than one language.⁹⁷ In Cyprus, evidence for language contact is limited to the epigraphic record alone. Because of the types of inscription that have survived, there is little chance of finding the sorts of phenomena that would elucidate the extent to which ancient Cypriots might have mastered more than one of the local languages: no example of a text displaying anything like mixed language features has been found, unless we count possible local examples of loanwords.⁹⁸ However, the bilingual inscriptions that have separate versions of the text in different languages have much to tell us about the sociolinguistic and historical context of their creation. They are discussed individually below, taking each site in turn so that the presentation of individual bilinguals can be compared with the regional fluctuations in the composition of the epigraphic record discussed in the [previous section](#).⁹⁹

Amathus

Four bilingual/digraphic inscriptions in Eteocypriot (written in the Cypriot Syllabary) and Greek (Koine dialect, written in the Greek alphabet).¹⁰⁰

Of the four surviving bilingual inscriptions from Amathus, only one is complete ([Figure 4.2](#)), while the other three are very fragmentary. All four are assumed to date to the late 4th century BC. The complete bilingual is perhaps the most famous Eteocypriot inscription, and has been the starting point for many studies of the language: by setting this otherwise obscure language alongside Greek, it provides a context for the language's use as well as a parallel text that allows our first glimpses into the possible meanings of words and morphological features (discussed in [Chapter 3, section 3.3.2](#) from a linguistic point of view).

⁹⁷ On issues of terminology used for ancient multilingual inscriptions, see Mullen (2012) 15–21. On Latin bilingualism specifically, see Adams (2003), Mullen (2011).

⁹⁸ On possible loanwords attested in Cypriot inscriptions, see Steele (2013) 213–14.

⁹⁹ Omitted from the present discussion are the Golgoi Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions incorporating some Phoenician signs and the digraphic coins from Marion, both discussed in the previous section. Also omitted are a pair of probably digraphic bone rings attributed with some uncertainty to Salamis, whose context is quite mysterious: see Steele (2013) 206–7.

¹⁰⁰ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Amathus 7, 17, 18, 33.

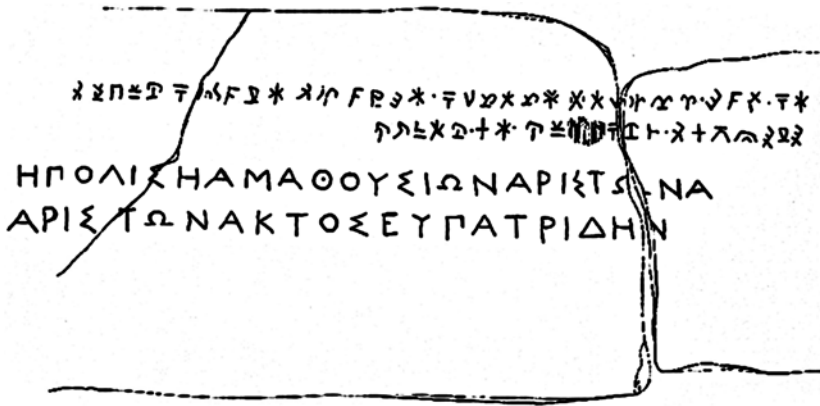


Figure 4.2 The complete Eteocypriot-Greek bilingual inscription from Amathus.

The text of the complete bilingual is as follows:

Eteocypriot (sinistroversive, Cypriot Syllabary):

1. *a-na ' ma-to-ri ' u-mi-e-sa-i-mu-ku-la-i-la-sa-na ' a-ri-si-to-no-se ' a-ra-to-wa-na-ka-so-ko-o-se*
2. *ke-ra-ke-re-tu-lo-se ' ? ta-ka-na-?-?-so-ti ' a-lo ' ka-i-li-po-ti*

Greek (dextroversive, Greek alphabet):

1. Η ΠΟΛΙΣ Η ΑΜΑΘΟΥΣΙΩΝ ΑΡΙΣΤΩΝΑ
2. ΑΡΙΣΤΩΝΑΚΤΟΣ ΕΥΠΑΤΡΙΔΗΝ

Translation: The city of the Amathusians, [to] Aristōn, son of Aristōnax, well-born.

From the point of view of assessing bilingual phenomena in the inscription, we have relatively little to go on since we cannot understand most of the Eteocypriot half, although we can observe that it appears longer than the Greek half and so may potentially contain more information. Each sign in the Cypriot Syllabary represents an open syllable (a vowel, or a consonant + vowel combination), meaning that most signs are equivalent to two alphabetic letters, making the Eteocypriot half of the inscription perhaps twice as long as the Greek. The Greek half is a typical honorific inscription of a type that was common in the wider Greek-speaking world by this time, dedicated by the city to an individual named Aristōn son of Aristōnax. It is written not in the local Cypriot dialect of Greek but in the Greek Koine, a variety of Greek originating from Attic that spread around the Mediterranean in particular following the conquests of Alexander the Great in the 4th century BC.

The choice of the Koine variety of Greek and its associated alphabet in this bilingual can be read in different ways. It could simply represent acquiescence to the increasing visibility of the Greek alphabet in late 4th-century BC Cyprus (see [Chapter 5, section 5.3](#)). If we also take into account the nature of the honorific dedication in the Greek half, which is very similar to the types of honorific inscriptions in use in democratic Athens and other parts of the Greek-speaking world, then it could be interpreted more specifically as a desire to emulate Mediterranean-wide Greek customs, perhaps on the part of the administrators of the city. There exists an alphabetic Greek-only inscription of similar type that also begins with the phrase ‘The city of the Amathusians’, found at Paphos (date unknown) but evidently originating from Amathus, which suggests that the complete bilingual was part of a once more extensive phenomenon of embracing the epigraphic practices of the wider Hellenistic Greek-speaking world; the text is quite fragmentary but may have been an Amathusian dedication set up at a Paphian sanctuary.¹⁰¹ We may also observe that using alphabetic, Koine Greek in the Amathus bilingual makes the inscription not only linguistically but also visibly bilingual by maintaining a visual distinction between each half of the inscription, which would presumably also have been obvious to non-Cypriots visiting Amathus and even illiterate locals.¹⁰²

The Eteocypriot half also includes the name that is given in the Greek half, thus guaranteeing that the two halves have equivalent (if not equal) content. In Eteocypriot the honorand is named as *a-ri-si-to-no-se a-ra-to-wa-na-ka-so-ko-o-se*, i.e. Aristōn son of Aristowanax (rather than Aristōnax), using the Eteocypriot patronymic formula *-o-ko-o-* and Eteocypriot morphological endings. The father’s name is given in the characteristically Cypriot/Eteocypriot form, preserving the intervocalic /w/¹⁰³ where the Greek omits it and conflates the vowels: in Eteocypriot this is a name with five syllables but in Koine Greek it has only four. Although we are told that the inscription is set up by Amathusians, and must suspect

¹⁰¹ Hellmann and Hermay (1980) 266–8 (with fig. 87).

¹⁰² See also Steele (2013) 167–72.

¹⁰³ The retention of /w/ is common in writing in Cypriot Greek, although hypercorrecting examples of unetymological /w/ from as early as the 7th or 6th century BC and up to the last full inscriptions at Kafizin in the 3rd century: Morpurgo Davies (1988) 101–8. By the late 4th century, the period from which the Amathus bilinguals date, /w/ had become quite rare in orthography and probably was also rare in pronunciation: Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 1 130. From Eteocypriot inscriptions in which Greek names appear, all again probably dating to the late 4th century, the retention of /w/ in these names within the Eteocypriot onomastic tradition appears to be a common trait and may suggest that they were adopted at an earlier stage when the /w/ phoneme was more stable in Cypriot Greek, and also that the phoneme remained stable in Eteocypriot later on: Steele (2013) 148–51.

that Eteocypriot is the dominant language in the bilingual (which could also perhaps be linked to the relative length of the Eteocypriot half compared with the Greek), there is clearly some effort to adapt the honorand's named to one recognisable to a non-Cypriot Greek audience while still preserving the traditional local form in the Eteocypriot. The rest of the content of the Eteocypriot half of the inscription remains a matter of guesswork while our knowledge of the language remains limited (see further [Chapter 3, section 3.3.2](#)).

The other three probable bilingual inscriptions are too fragmentary to be able to say very much about their content or even context.¹⁰⁴ One is certainly a royal inscription commemorating the setting up of a statue of the son of King Androcles, as we are told in the Greek half, while the Cypriot Syllabic half has only three signs surviving and cannot be reconstructed. Another clearly mentions the name Androcles (presumably a reference to the same king) in the Cypriot Syllabic half, whose sense cannot be reconstructed as Greek and is assumed to be Eteocypriot,¹⁰⁵ while the Greek half preserves only the end of a dedication to Cypriot Aphrodite. The third has only two alphabetic letters surviving, and a sequence of three syllabic signs that has no convincing Greek interpretation and is again assumed to be Eteocypriot. For at least two of these texts, then, the presence of Eteocypriot language and hence their bilingual nature is reconstructed based on probability, but their digraphic nature is assured (the other, but much less likely, possibility being that they could be bidialectal, i.e. in syllabic Cypriot Greek alongside alphabetic Koine Greek). They are official dedicatory monumental inscriptions and may have a similar context to the complete bilingual (discussed in more detail in [Chapter 3, section 3.3.3](#)).

Idalion

One bilingual/digraphic inscription in Phoenician and Cypriot Syllabic Greek, plus a further possible example.

A bilingual statuette base found in the sanctuary of Apollo at Idalion was famously the inscription that provided an important key to deciphering the Cypriot Syllabic script, via a comparison between the Greek syllabic half and the Phoenician half (the Phoenician script having been deciphered in the 18th century). The discovery of other monolingual inscriptions in both Greek and Phoenician at the same site furthers the impression that both

¹⁰⁴ On these inscriptions, see Steele (2013) 113–15 (EC 15–17).

¹⁰⁵ According to Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 584 (Amathus 17), ‘une inscription digraphe grecque-grecque est pourtant très improbable à Amathonte’).

languages were in use by worshippers at the sanctuary,¹⁰⁶ which means that a priori it is likely that speakers of the languages were coming into contact with each other. The bilingual inscription, however, has a specific political context that must be taken into account.

The bilingual makes specific reference to the fourth year of the reign of Milkyaton king of Kition and Idalion, which can be identified with reasonable certainty as 388 BC. Both the Greek and the Phoenician halves of the inscription are somewhat damaged (Figure 4.3), but nevertheless substantial pieces of text are preserved and the overall sense can be reconstructed well. The text reads as follows (with reconstructions in square brackets based on other similar inscriptions):

Phoenician (sinistroverse):

1. [BYMM? LYRH?] BŠNT 'RB' 4 LMLK · MLKYTN [MLK]
2. [KTY W'DYL SML] 'Z 'Š YTN WYTN · 'DN · B'LR[M]
3. [BN 'BDMLK L'L]Y LRŠP MKL · K ŠM QL YBRK

Translation: On day ? of the month ? in year IV of King Milkyaton King of Kition and Idalion: this is the statue which Lord Baalrom son of Abdimilk gave and raised to his Lord Reshep Mikal because he heard his voice: may he bless.

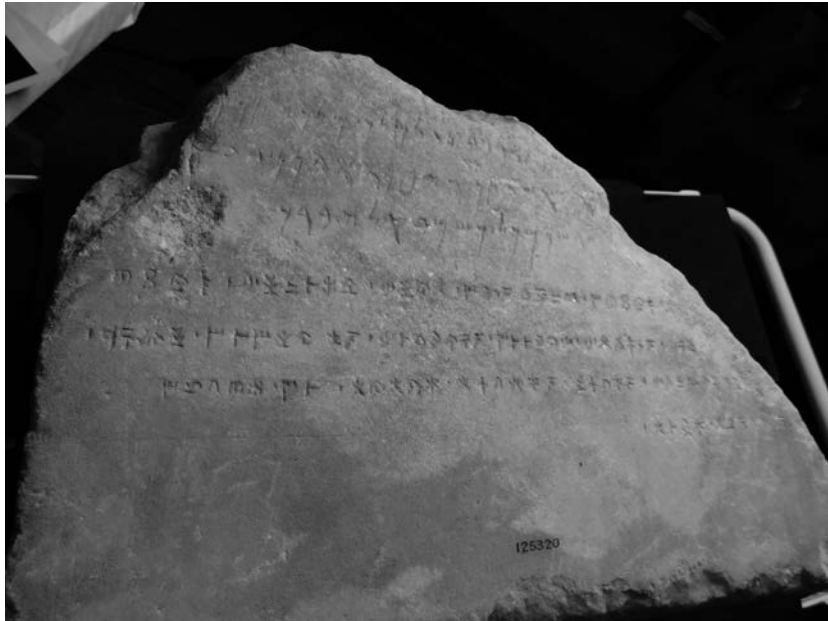


Figure 4.3 Bilingual statuette base from Idalion

¹⁰⁶ See O. Masson (1961/83) p. 246 and p. 235 n.2.

Greek (Cypriot Syllabary, sinistrovers):

1.]-ṯ' *pa-si-le-wo-se* ' *mi-li-ki-ja-to-no-se* ' *ke-ti-o-ne* ' *ka-e-ta-li-o-ne* ' *pa-si-le-u*
2.]-me-na-ne ' *to-pe-pa-me-ro-ne* ' *ne-wo-so-ta-ta-se* ' *to-na-ti-ri-ja-ta-ne* ' *to-te-ka-te-se-ta-se* ' *o-wa-na-xe*
3.]-o-a-pi-ti-mi-li-ko-ne ' *to-a-po-lo-ni* ' *to-a-mu-ko-lo-i* ' *a-po-i-wo-i* ' *ta-se* ' *e-u-ko-la-se*
4. [e]-pe-tu-ke ' *i-tu-ka-i* ' *a-ga-ta-i* '

Translation: [In the fourth year] of King Milkyaton, reigning over Kition and Idalion, on the last (day) of the period of five intercalary days, the prince (Baalrom), son of Abdimilk, has dedicated this statuette to Apollo Amyklos, from whom he has obtained the accomplishment of his wish. To good fortune.

The dedicant of the inscription is named in the Phoenician half as Baalrom, but his name is missing from the Greek half; Masson assumes that we should reconstruct *pa-a-la-ro-mo-se* in the Greek,¹⁰⁷ but another possibility might be that an equivalent Greek name would have been given instead, since this is a common practice in Greek/Phoenician bilinguals. His father's name is missing from the Phoenician half, but appears in the Greek half as *a-pi-ti-mi-li-ko-ne*, a direct transliteration of a Phoenician name Abdimilk but with Greek inflection in the genitive. The king's name is treated in the same way: *mi-li-ki-ja-to-no-se* (Greek nominative ending) for Milkyaton (*MLKYTN* in the Phoenician). The theonyms in the inscription also show a correspondence, with the Greek god Apollo given as an equivalent to the Phoenician god Reshep, and Reshep's epithet *MKL* appearing in the Greek as *a-mu-ko-lo-i*, adding an initial *a-* that cannot easily be explained.¹⁰⁸ We know that the Greek version of the god's name is not a one-off transliteration, since *Apollōni Amuklaiōi* is attested in a Greek alphabetic inscription from Idalion dated to the 3rd century BC.¹⁰⁹

The inscription dates from the period after the annexation of Idalion by the Phoenician-ruled kingdom of Kition (which had taken place in the mid-5th century BC and was mentioned in the previous section s.v. Idalion), a fact made explicit in the reference in the text to Milkyaton as king of both Kition and Idalion (preserved only in the Greek half). This gives some context to the dedication and to the choice made by the dedicant to use a bilingual inscription, with the Greek half perhaps added in order to give

¹⁰⁷ O. Masson (1961/83) p. 247.

¹⁰⁸ See Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 1 247–8, (1992) s.v. *a-mu-ko-lo-i*.

¹⁰⁹ O. Masson (1968) 397–400.

access to the inscription's content to a considerable local community of Greek speakers. The choice of the epithet Mikal/Amuklos for Reshep/Apollo may also point towards a 'diplomatic gesture or political requirement', since the worship of a god Mikal is attested at Kition in a Phoenician inscription of the 5th century BC: this could be a deliberate attempt to make a link between Phoenician religious practice at the two cities.¹¹⁰

The Greek translation of the Phoenician text shows clear sensitivity to the local Greek-speaking tradition. The traditional Phoenician dedicatory formula at the end of the inscription, *K ŠM QL YBRK* ('because he heard his voice: may he bless'), is not translated directly but is rather reflected in the traditional Cypriot Greek formula typically found at the end of such inscriptions: *i-tu-ka-i a-ga-ta-i* ('to good fortune'), versions of which were still in use in the dedicatory inscriptions of Kafizin in the later part of the 3rd century BC.¹¹¹ The use of *wa-na-xe* as Baalrom's title, parallel with 'DN ('lord') in the Phoenician half, also reflects the purely local usage of this word to denote a member of a royal dynasty ('prince' *vel sim.*). Elsewhere in the Greek-speaking world, the term (*w*)*anax* had long lost the royal association that had otherwise been present only in the early Mycenaean use of the term, with relics of this usage surviving in Homer.

Although this bilingual inscription was issued by a royal member of the group who had taken over Idalion in the previous century, and makes some assertion of Phoenician language use and religious practice in Idalion's sanctuary of Apollo, one could argue that it does not seem to be making any overt or aggressive statement of political dominance. The Greek part is not a mechanical word-by-word translation of the Phoenician but rather a version of the same text that shows understanding of local Greek-speaking customs and cultural/linguistic traditions, right down to the use of the traditional Cypriot Greek dedication formula, *i-tu-ka-i a-ga-ta-i*. This is a text with two closely agreeing versions that is nevertheless adapted to two possible different linguistic audiences.

A further possible example of a bilingual inscription from Idalion dating to the 5th century BC is mentioned by Ohnefalsch-Richter in a 19th-century publication.¹¹² The inscribed object is a fragmentary stele of Cypro-Phoenician type, more than a metre in height, showing significant traces of paint in its decoration. The inscription itself was also painted, but has now been completely obliterated. Although Ohnefalsch-Richter was convinced

¹¹⁰ Peckham (1968b) 320.

¹¹¹ E.g. Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Kafizin 4 (*i-to-ka-*), 20 (*tu-ka-*), 21 (*i-tu-ka-i*), 58 (*e-pa-ga-ta-i-tu-ka-*).

¹¹² Ohnefalsch-Richter (1888) 63–4 and pl. V no. 5.

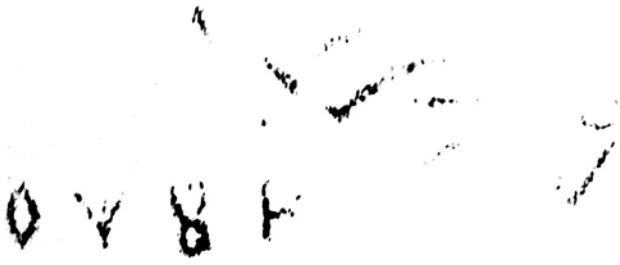


Figure 4.4 Possible bilingual inscription from Idalion.

of the Phoenician character of some of the signs in the inscription, the accompanying illustration that he published does not show them clearly enough to be certain. However, the illustration does show a sequence of clear Cypriot syllabic signs reading]*ta-le-ṭe-ja*[from right to left ([Figure 4.4](#); the *ta* is however oriented to the right). The third sign, *ṭe*, appears to be missing the horizontal stroke at the bottom, which could simply have faded. The object does not seem to have been studied by an expert who could read Phoenician while the inscription was still visible, and so it is impossible to confirm whether it was indeed a bilingual.

Kition

One bilingual/digraphic inscription in Phoenician and (alphabetic) Greek.

The only surviving bilingual inscription from Kition arose from very particular circumstances: it is the grave stele of a non-Cypriot deceased man called Smyrnos, a ‘maker of cups’ said in the Greek part to come from Xanthos in Lycia ([Figure 4.5](#)):¹¹³

Greek (Greek alphabet):

1. ΞΑΝΘΙΟΣ
2. [ΕΚ] ΛΥΚΙΗΣ
3. [Σ]ΜΥΡΝΟΣ
4. ΕΝΘΑΔΕ ΚΕΙ-
5. ΜΑΙ ΑΝΗΡ
6. ΕΚΠΩΜΑΤΟ-
7. ΠΟΙΟΣ

Translation: A Xanthian from Lycia, I, Smyrnos, lie in here, a maker of cups.

¹¹³ See Yon ([2004](#)) nos. 1066 (Phoenician half) and 2068 (Greek half).

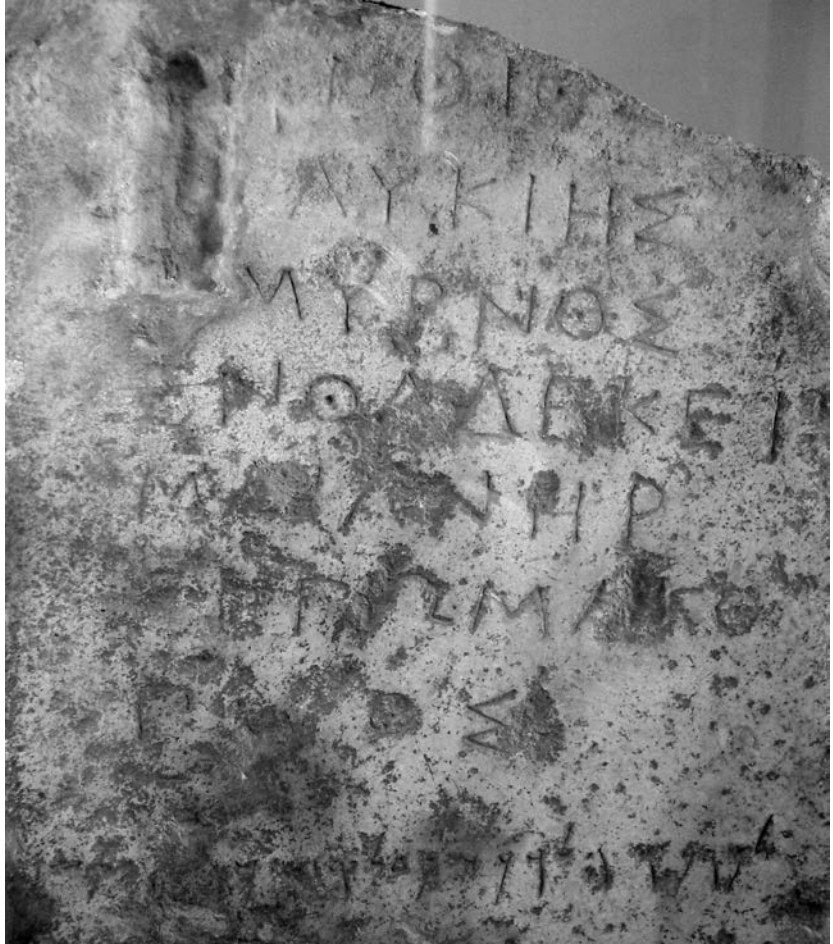


Figure 4.5 Bilingual gravestone from Kition.

Phoenician:

LMNRS HLWKY P'L QŠM ' [Š B]BT Z

Translation: To MNRS the Lycian, maker of cups (?), who is in this (funerary) house.

The careful arrangement of the seven-line, partly hexametrical Greek alphabetic text stands in contrast to the much smaller text in Phoenician at the bottom, which repeats the anthroponym (though as *MNRS* rather than the expected *SMRNS*, perhaps suggesting confusion over the pronunciation of the name) and ethnic (*LWKY*). It also perhaps repeats his occupational designation 'maker of cups' (though this word, *P'L*, would be a Phoenician hapax legomenon), and if the end is restored correctly then it adds a brief reference to the tomb of a general type common in Phoenician epitaphs.

Rather than giving any indication of broader patterns of language contact in Cyprus, this monument gives evidence only of a specific situation in which a bilingual text was created, presumably reflecting the death of a foreigner in a predominantly Phoenician-speaking part of Cyprus.

Kourion

One bilingual/digraphic inscription in Phoenician and another language written in the Cypriot Syllabary (inscription too damaged/fragmentary to identify the language).

The single digraphic inscription found at Kourion ([Figure 4.6](#)) is a funerary monument with a ‘window’ motif well known in other Cypriot stelai, and usually identified as Phoenician in style. The object is of unknown date, but the letters of the Phoenician part of the inscription were dated palaeographically by the inscription’s editors to the 7th century BC.¹¹⁴ The inscription is beneath the window motif, on a section of the stele that is badly damaged; only a part of the left-hand side is preserved well enough to

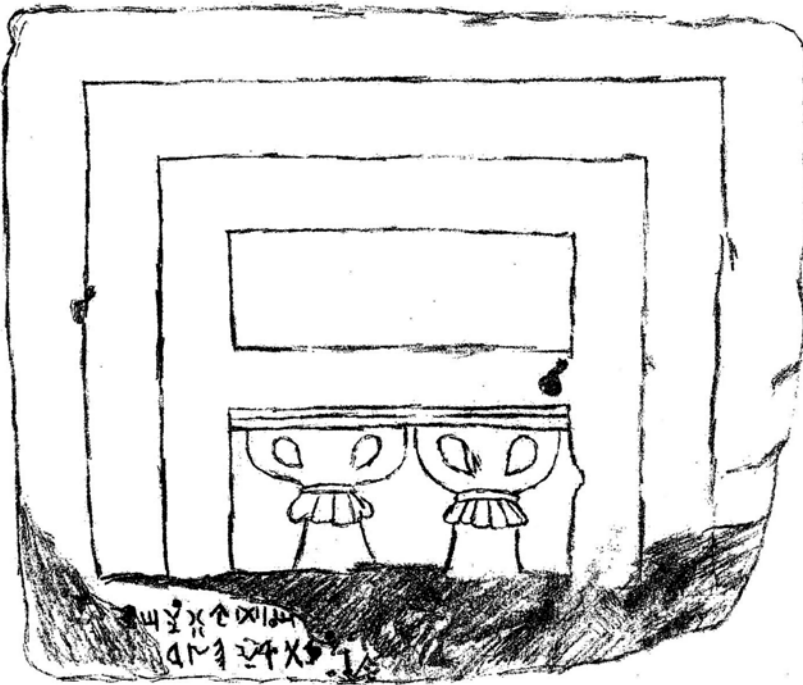


Figure 4.6 Bilingual inscription from Kourion.

¹¹⁴ O. Masson and Szyver (1970) 229.

detect the presence of writing, while the middle and right are very badly damaged and eroded. One partial line of Cypriot Syllabic signs and two of Phoenician are preserved:

Cypriot Syllabary (probably sinistroverse, but Paphian forms; Greek or Eteocypriot?):

] -se ' mu-ṣp-wa-ṭe-se[

Phoenician (sinistroverse):

1.] -M WBĠRY HṢD-[
2.] -T Z[

Translation: ... and at Kourion, the Sidonian ... (??)

The Cypriot Syllabic half is too damaged to read any recognisable sequence, and the reading of two of the six preserved signs is uncertain (the one transcribed here as ṣp could perhaps be interpreted as ḳa, and the ṭe is indistinct). Two words of the Phoenician part can plausibly be interpreted: WBĠRY as either 'and at Kourion' (which would make this inscription the only attestation of the Phoenician word for the city) or 'and BKRY' (where BKRY would be a previously unattested Phoenician name); HṢD-[could be completed as HṢD[NY, 'the Sidonian'.¹¹⁵

It has often been assumed that this inscription is not bilingual, and that the two halves of the text do not correspond with one another.¹¹⁶ However, on inspection of the inscription, the palaeography of the text and its placement on the stele strongly suggest that both the Cypriot Syllabic and the Phoenician half are contemporary and coherent with each other; this seems much more likely than a later reuse of the stone if we consider palaeographic factors. Firstly, the Cypriot Syllabic inscription is placed directly above the Phoenician and is quite closely in line with it. Secondly, even though they are written in different scripts, the ductus of the Cypriot Syllabic signs is remarkably similar to that of the Phoenician signs, and the signs in both scripts are of approximately the same height and incised into the stone at a similar depth. It is difficult to confirm whether they were carved by the same hand because sign shapes in two different scripts cannot be compared with each other, but the whole inscription appears homogeneous enough to hypothesise that this is the case.

¹¹⁵ O. Masson and Sznycer (1970) 231, (1972) 91. The interpretation of WBĠRY as 'and at Kourion' seems the more likely hypothesis, given the location of the inscription, but O. Masson and Sznycer prefer the interpretation as an anthroponym (presumably in part because of the funerary context of the inscription). See also Bonnet (1990) 142–3. Note that the reading of the letter *kaph* is not completely secure, however; a *taw* would be possible.

¹¹⁶ O. Masson and Sznycer (1972) 90, Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 673 (Kourion 20).

The inscription also gives further reasons to argue strongly against a later reuse of the stone. Reuse of a grave marker in itself may be considered unlikely, and especially so when the second inscription is placed so close to the first and looks deliberately in keeping with it. It would be more usual in the case of a reused piece of stone for the new inscription to be placed on a different part of the object so that it is visibly separate. Not being able to detect any correspondence between the two halves of the inscription also cannot be called upon as evidence that the inscription is not bilingual, considering the damaged state of the text: the surviving portion written in the Cypriot Syllabary consists of only six signs and the Phoenician of only eleven. We can assume that the two halves are written in different languages and so we should not expect direct lexical overlap except in the case of anthroponyms or toponyms. The surviving sequences could also be from different portions of the text: for example, we may have something close to the end of the Cypriot Syllabic half since it is at the left-hand end and assumed to be *sinistroverso*, but considering that the Phoenician half clearly has two lines (the second poorly preserved), it may be that the better-preserved sequence in the upper line of Phoenician text comes from the middle of the inscription. The chances of equivalent sequences having survived in these circumstances are very slight. We can also observe that it is in any case common for the two halves of a bilingual inscription to contain some different (and different amounts of) information.¹¹⁷

Based on the above reasoning, and in the absence of any convincing reason to believe that this text did not originate as a bilingual inscription, we have to assume that it always deliberately incorporated two languages/scripts. If the dating by Phoenician letter forms is accurate, then this would be the earliest surviving bilingual inscription from Cyprus. It therefore points towards a perhaps very early use of bilingual and digraphic writing in the sphere of funerary monuments.

Larnax tes Lapethou

One bilingual/digraphic inscription in (alphabetic) Greek and Phoenician.

The single bilingual inscription found at the Larnax tes Lapethou sanctuary site, located near to the ancient city of Lapethos, is a religious

¹¹⁷ To take just one example, one may compare the bilingual stele from Rhodes recording the name of a deceased man from Kition in Cyprus (Yon (2004) no. 172). The Greek half reads (in the Greek alphabet) 'Herakleides the Kitian', and the Phoenician half beneath reads 'Abdmelqart son of Abdsasom son of TGNS': i.e. there is no lexical/semantic overlap between the two halves of the inscription whatsoever, and the Greek and Phoenician halves give different information about the deceased.

dedication to the goddess Athena Nike and King Ptolemy in the Greek half and the goddess Anat and King Ptolemy in the Phoenician half. Each half has five lines, with the Greek text, written in the Greek alphabet, coming first.¹¹⁸

Greek (Greek alphabet, dextroverse):

1. ΑΘΗΝΑ ΣΩΤΕΙΡΑ ΝΙΚΗ
2. ΚΑΙ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ
3. ΠΡΑΞΙΔΗΜΟΣ ΣΕΣΜΑΟΣ ΤΟΝ
4. ΒΩ[ΜΟ]Ν ΑΝΕΘ[ΗΚ]ΕΝ
5. ΑΓΑ[Θ]Η ΤΥΧΗ

Translation: To Athena Soteira Nike and King Ptolemy, Praxidemos son of Sesmas set up this altar. Good fortune.

Phoenician:

1. L'NT M'Z HYM
2. WL'DMLKM PTLMYŠ
3. B'LŠLM BN [S]ŠMY
4. YQDŠ [']T MZBH
5. [L]M̊ZL N'M

Translation: To Anat strength of the living and to the Lord of Kings Ptolemy, Baalshillem son of SSMY consecrated the altar for a good destiny.

The inscription is certainly quite late and originates from the period after the Ptolemaic annexation of the island, but the exact dating depends on which victory is being commemorated in the inscription through the reference to Nike, making it either very late 4th or early 3rd century BC.¹¹⁹

There are strong indications that Phoenician was the primary language of the inscription's author. Both halves of the text begin by specifying to whom the inscription is dedicated, a goddess (Athena Soteira Nike in Greek and Anat, 'fortress/strength of the living' in the Phoenician) and to King Ptolemy (who is described as 'DMLKM 'lord of kings' rather than just *MLK* 'king' in the Phoenician). While in the Phoenician the preposition *L* is used to specify each recipient of the dedication, the Greek half fails to show the syntactic relationship between these noun phrases and the main verb: the first recipient, Ἀθήνα Σώτειρα Νίκη, appears to be in the nominative rather than the expected dative, while the second, βασιλέως Πτολεμαίου, is in the

¹¹⁸ See Steele (2013) Ph 16.

¹¹⁹ See SEG 38 (1988) 469, no. 1526. Also De Vogüé (1889–) I 95, Donner and Röllig (1966) 42.

genitive. The awkwardness of the Greek makes it very unlikely that Greek was the author's first language, and even though the Greek is written above the Phoenician, we must conclude that the Phoenician text was the primary one and the Greek was translated from it. This would not be unexpected considering that the other two surviving inscriptions from the same site are both in Phoenician.

The prominent physical placing of the Greek text may indicate deference to the new Ptolemaic regime, despite the dominance of Phoenician as the local language of administration (see the previous section s.v. Lapethos). The text also shows some accommodation of local Cypriot Greek traditions with the phrase ἀγαθή τύχη, which, although it is written in alphabetic Greek, parallels the common Cypriot formula used at the end of religious dedications, *in (agathai) tuk^hai*. The dedicant of the inscription also gives himself a Greek name, Praxidēmos (in pan-Mediterranean Koine form, with ē from earlier ā) that is unrelated to his Phoenician name, Baalshillem, while he preserves the Phoenician character of his father's name (SSMY) but gives it Greek inflection as a masculine a-stem (*Sesmaos*, the genitive of a base form *Sesmas*). There are clearly multiple influences affecting the presentation of the Greek half of the inscription, from a desire to 'hellenise' the dedicant's name and observe local Cypriot traditions, to the use of not the local dialect and script but the more widely recognisable Greek alphabet, which was also the official script of the Ptolemaic regime. Meanwhile we can observe the more accurate rendering of the Phoenician half of the inscription, and an apparent desire to maintain the language's visibility even though it comes in second place below the Greek half.

Tamassos

Two bilingual/digraphic inscriptions in Phoenician and (syllabic) Greek.

The two bilingual inscriptions from Tamassos have a similar context to the one from Idalion, both constituting statue bases with religious dedications to Reshep/Apollo and found in a sanctuary of Apollo, these ones at the site of Phrangissa near Tamassos. Like the Idalion bilingual, they also date to the first half of the 4th century BC, one to 362 and the other probably to 375, the dates reconstructed from their references to years of the reign of Milkyaton, king of Kition and Idalion (the same king cited in the Idalion text). Although Tamassos was later formally incorporated into the territory governed by Kition, at the point when the inscriptions were erected the city was not as far

as we know under Phoenician administration.¹²⁰ The inscriptions show considerable similarity to each other as well as to the Idalion bilingual.

The individuals who set up the inscriptions are named, but little information is given about them. One is named as Menahem son of Benhodesh (equated with Mnasēs son of Nōmēnios in the Greek half), and is described as originating from Arqa, a city in Phoenicia (Figure 4.7).¹²¹

Phoenician (sinistroverse):

1. SML 'Z 'Š YTN WYṬN
2. ' · MNḤM · BN BNḤD Š BN MN-
3. ḤM BN 'RQ L'DNY L[RŠ]P
4. 'LYYT BYRḤ 'TNM BŠNT
5. ŠLŠM 20+10 LMLK MLKYTN · MLK
6. KTY W'DYL · KŠM' QL · YBRK

Translation: This is the statue which Menahem son of Benhodesh son of Menahem son of Arqa (i.e. from Arqa?) gave and raised to his Lord Reshep Elyt in the month of Etanim in year XXX of King Milkyaton King of Kition and Idalion because he heard his voice: may he bless.

Greek (Cypriot Syllabary; sinistroverse):

1. to-na-ti-ri-a-ta-ne // to-nu · e-to-ke-ne
2. ka-se · o-ne-te-ke-ne // ma-na-se-se
3. o-no-me-ni-o-ne // to-i-ti-o-i
4. to-i-a-pe-i-lo-ni // to-i-e-le-i
5. ta-i // i-tu-ka-i

Translation: This statuette, which Mnases, son of Nomenios, gave and dedicated to the god Apollo in the marsh. To fortune.

The other is named as Abdsasom son of ? (patronymic missing from the Phoenician half), equated with Ab(d)sasomos son of Samas in the Greek half).¹²²

Phoenician:

1. BYMM 10+6 LYRḤ P'LT BŠ[N-]
2. T 10+7? LMLK MLKY[TN MLK K-]
3. TY W'DYL SML 'Z 'Š YTN 'B-
4. DSSM BN ... L'DNY LRŠP ' -
5. LHYTS HNDR'S NDR KŠM'
6. H' QL YBRK

¹²⁰ An inscription from Kition records Milkyaton's son, Pumayyaton, as king of Tamassos as well as Kition and Idalion at some point later on in his reign: Yon (2004) no. 1002.

¹²¹ O. Masson (1961/83) no. 215, Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Tamassos 2, Steele (2013) Ph 13.

¹²² O. Masson (1961/83) no. 216, Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Tamassos 3, Steele (2013) Ph 12.

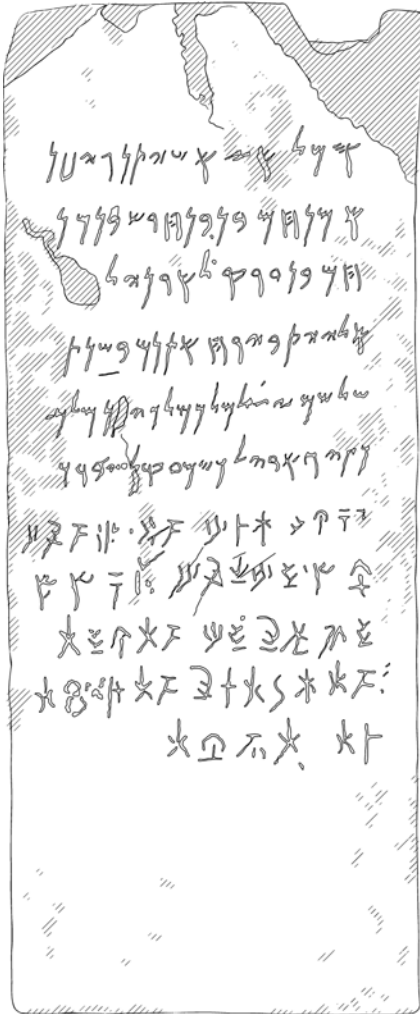


Figure 4.7 Bilingual statuette base from Tamassos.

Translation: On day 16 of the month of Paalit in year XVII of King Milkyaton King of Kition and Idalion: this is the statue which Abdsasom son of? gave and raised to his Lord Reshep Elhyts, a votive which he vowed because he heard his voice: may he bless.

Greek (Cypriot Syllabary; sinistr.):

1. a-ti-ri-a-se // o-nu-to-ne-to
2. ke-ne · a-pa-sa-so-mo-se · o-sa
3. ma-wo-se · to-i-a-[po-lo]-ni-to-i
4. a-la-si-o-ta-i · i-tu-ka-i

Translation: This statuette, which Ab(d)sasom, son of Samas, gave to Apollo Alasiotas. To fortune.

In the name equivalences, we see already multiple strategies for ‘translating’ a Phoenician name into Greek: Abdsasom is transliterated as *a-pa-sa-so-mo-se* and given Greek inflection; Menahem is equated with a Greek name, Mnasēs, presumably chosen because it sounds superficially similar to the original Phoenician name; the Greek version of Benhodesh, Nōmēnios, is a direct semantic translation of the Phoenician ‘son of the new moon’ (with the usual patronymic expression with *BN* in the Phoenician **Ben**hodesh but the accustomed Greek genitive of father’s name in the Greek Noumenios). These can be compared with strategies for ‘translating’ or equating names in other bilinguals that we have already seen, for example the transcription of Milkyaton in the Greek half of the Idalion bilingual, and the use of an unrelated equivalent name, Praxidēmos, by the dedicant of the Larnax tes Lapethou bilingual named as Baalshillem in the Phoenician half.

As in the Idalion bilingual, sensitivity is shown to the differences in Phoenician and Greek religious formulations, with Phoenician *K ŠM QL YBRK* (‘because he heard his voice: may he bless’) placed in parallel with the typical Cypriot Greek formula *i-tu-ka-i* (‘to fortune’) in both inscriptions. The Phoenician god Reshep is again equated with the Greek god Apollo. The epithets given to Reshep/Apollo in these two texts seem to show a further level of adaptation of Phoenician religious practice to local customs because they are transliterated directly from the Greek: in Menahem’s inscription, *a-pe-i-lo-ni’ to-i-e-le-wi-ta-i* is equated with *L[RŠ]P’LYYT* (i.e. Elewitās in Greek and something like Eleit(ās) in Phoenician, the latter omitting the /w/ and perhaps suggesting that it was not pronounced¹²³), and in Abdsasom’s inscription, *a-[po¹²⁴-lo]-ni-to-i / a-la-si-o-ta-i* is equated with *LRŠP’LHYTS* (i.e. Alasiotās in Greek and perhaps Alahiotās in Phoenician, the latter apparently showing /s/ > /h/, perhaps reflecting local pronunciation¹²⁵).

The Phoenician half of Abdsasom’s bilingual is set out in the typical way, beginning with the reference to the month and year of Milkyaton’s reign before mentioning the dedicant and the god to whom the statue is dedicated. In this context, the invocation at the end, *K ŠM H’ QL YBRK* (‘because he

¹²³ See Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 813.

¹²⁴ There is probably only space for two missing signs, not the three necessary to spell the word as *a-pe-i-lo-ni* as in the other inscription.

¹²⁵ See Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 813–14, and vol. 1 168–70 on the evidence for some weakening of the /s/ phoneme in Cypriot Greek.

heard his voice: may he bless') makes sense and follows on immediately after the description of the statue: he erected the statue because he heard his voice. However, the arrangement of the Phoenician half of Abdsasom's bilingual is peculiar, describing the statue being dedicated to Reshep, then the month and year of Milkyaton's reign, followed by the formula *K ŠM QL YBRK*. The placing of the date further down the inscription is unexpected, since in monumental inscriptions of this type it is usually placed at the beginning, making explicit not only the date but also the political regime under which the dedication is being made. It also breaks up the dedication by placing some distance between the act of erecting the statue and the formulaic reason as to why it was done. This fact, coupled with the explicit use of a Greek name by the dedicant in the Greek half of the inscription, may suggest that the use of a bilingual in this case was a matter of more than simply translating the Phoenician text for a different linguistic audience. We may further observe that neither of the Tamassos bilinguals mentions the date or the reign of king Milkyaton in the Greek half, a telling difference from the Greek text of the Idalion bilingual and probably suggestive of the distance of Tamassos from the political situation of contemporary Idalion.

4.4 Language Contact and Visibility

The discussion of individual Cypriot bilingual inscriptions in the previous section (4.3) somewhat compounds the impression drawn from a survey of sites where inscriptions in multiple languages are attested (section 4.2.2), namely that language use and language contact in ancient Cyprus were factors that were to some extent regionally determined. The types of bilingual inscriptions that have survived are almost exclusively ones that have a close relationship with political context, whether they are in themselves political texts (e.g. the honorific found in the Amathus bilingual) or texts issuing from particular individuals involved in or explicitly mentioning the political regime under which the text was commissioned (e.g. the Idalion and Tamassos religious dedications).

The appearance of Greek in bilingual inscriptions in Iron Age Cyprus is a clear indicator that the island's Greek speakers were in contact with speakers of other languages, but the nature of that contact is not straightforward. Although signalling multilingualism of a sort, these inscriptions do not give very good evidence for the presence of multilingual speakers, for example individuals who could speak both Greek and Phoenician or both Greek and Eteocypriot; evidence of this kind is limited

to one or two examples of loanwords from Greek to Phoenician or vice versa.¹²⁶ There is much better evidence for a broader sociolinguistic and cultural contact, which is made obvious not only through the deliberate choice to put two languages together on an inscription, but also by further choices made when deciding how to phrase each part of the text. Individual examples, as we have seen, show varying linguistic competence in making the translation and varying degrees of sensitivity to cultural traditions. The Idalion and Tamassos bilinguals appear to issue from a broader context in which the Greek god Apollo and the Phoenician god Reshep were equated with each other and worshipped in the same physical locations. While they may make some compromises in the amount and type of information they give about the dedicant and the date and context of the dedication, sometimes with variation between each half of the inscription, they accommodate the relevant traditional religious formula for each language.

Another point of contact comes in the choices made when giving the names of individuals involved in the inscription. Writing or commissioning an inscription in two separate halves forces the author to choose how to represent each name within two different linguistic contexts, and the results vary. In the Amathus bilingual, some allowance was made for the form of the patronym in Eteocypriot (preserving /w/) and the Greek Koine (omitting /w/ and eliding the vowels), while the son's name appeared the same in both halves except for the different inflection in each language. The Phoenician inscriptions show an even more striking range of strategies employed in rendering equivalent names in Greek, which can be observed most explicitly in bilinguals but also in some other types of text. We have some examples of a Phoenician name being transliterated into Greek, as with the Phoenician *Abdimilk* rendered in the syllabic Greek part of the Idalion bilingual as *a-pi-ti-mi-li-ko-ne*. Sometimes, rather than transliterating, a similar-sounding name is chosen: *Menahem* becomes *ma-na-se-se* in the Greek half of one of the Tamassos inscriptions (*Mnases*, a name attested in other Cypriot Greek texts). The other Tamassos bilingual gives a semantic translation, where *Benhodesh*, 'son of the new moon', becomes *Noumenios* in Greek; this exact equivalence also appears in an Athenian inscription that is known to be the grave stele of a Cypriot Phoenician.¹²⁷ A further example originating from outside Cyprus shows a cultural or ideological equivalence, with an equivalent deity employed in an

¹²⁶ E.g. Phoenician *TRPY* from Greek *tropaion* (not otherwise attested in Phoenician) in an inscription from Kition (Yon (2004) no. 1144). See Steele (2013) 213–14.

¹²⁷ Yon (2004) no. 165.

equivalent theophoric name: Herakleides, meaning ‘descendant of Herakles’, is given as the alternative name for Abdmelqart, meaning ‘servant of Melqart’, in a bilingual from Rhodes mentioning a Cypriot Phoenician.¹²⁸

It is particularly in bilingual inscriptions that it is clearest that the same individual is using one name in one linguistic context and another name in another. Outside of this context it is difficult to be certain that we are dealing with comparable data, but we do find phenomena whereby different members of the same family have names derived from different languages: two examples already seen in this chapter are the apparent use of names from different linguistic traditions in the royal dynasties of Lapethos (with kings’ names including Greek ones such as Damowanax and Phoenician ones such as Sidqimilk) and Marion (where Sasma son of Doxandros is recorded on a coin, a Phoenician-named son of a Greek-named father).¹²⁹ There is clearly contact between languages here, but how do we explain it? One of the ways of understanding these relations has been to cite some mixing of population groups, for example Seibert’s *Mischbevölkerung*¹³⁰ or Gjerstad’s cultural *milieu*,¹³¹ but these fail to account in any detail for the mechanisms by which these linguistic phenomena come about – just as standard assumptions about hostility between the island’s Greek and Phoenician speakers also do not reflect the surviving evidence very well.¹³² Considering that we have good evidence for individuals using different names in different linguistic contexts in the bilingual inscriptions, as well as evidence of, for example, Greek names being adopted in the Eteocypriot onomastic tradition, we do not need to call on phenomena such as intermarriage to account for families with mixed names. The names can be transferred from one linguistic group to another without individual speakers also having to move between groups: all that is needed is a fashion for particular names, exposure to different onomastic traditions, or a social or political situation in which it mattered whether an individual used a name from one tradition or another.

The bilingual inscriptions also give us some impression of attitudes towards the use of different languages in ancient Cyprus. Writing is a physical manifestation of language, and deliberate strategies in using languages and scripts for official monuments demonstrate the close link between Cypriot political identities and linguistic groups. Just as the

¹²⁸ Yon (2004) no. 172.

¹²⁹ See further Steele (2013) 218–25.

¹³⁰ Seibert (1976) 14.

¹³¹ Gjerstad (1979) 242.

¹³² Maier (1985) and see section 4.1 above.

fragmented political geography of Iron Age Cyprus has been argued to be a strong factor in sustaining multilingualism on the island during the course of most of the 1st millennium BC,¹³³ we could say that this also played a role in sustaining the use of different scripts for the different languages, a sort of ‘multiscriptualism’ or ‘polygraphia’. The presence of different writing systems allowed each language to be represented visibly as a separate entity. The desire to show this presence of multiple languages visibly is felt especially in the Eteocypriot/Greek bilinguals, which use the local syllabic script for Eteocypriot but eschew it for Greek and instead use the Greek alphabet: the choice is not only linguistic (choosing the pan-Mediterranean Koine variety of Greek) but also visual. The remarkable longevity of the Cypriot Syllabic script while the rest of the Greek-speaking world had been using the alphabet for hundreds of years also points towards a strong link between language (the local dialect) in its physical written form (the local script) and Cypriot identity. This will lead on to the theme of this book’s [final chapter](#), looking at the use of writing by Cypriots at home and abroad.

¹³³ Iacovou (2008a) 640.

... any sound or sight may reach the brain of a person without entering into his consciousness. We may say that he 'hears' or 'sees' but does not 'notice' it ... A man's interests are the selective agents and these are to a great extent socially determined for it is generally the value attached to an object by all members of a social group that directs the attention of an individual towards it.¹

5.1 Writing and Identity

The first four chapters of this book have considered various aspects of writing in ancient Cyprus: when and why the technology was first adopted on the island in the early Late Bronze Age (Chapter 1); the context of the development or adoption of new writing systems in or around the Early Iron Age (Chapter 2); ways in which we can study the many Cypriot inscriptions that we cannot 'read' (Chapter 3); multiple written forms as a visible reflection of linguistic diversity, especially during the Iron Age (Chapter 4). This concluding chapter aims to tie together strands of a theme that has recurred throughout, namely the development and retention of distinctive and idiosyncratic methods of writing on Cyprus.

When writing first appeared, perhaps in the 16th century BC, it was not in the form of the nearby well-established cuneiform writing systems from the Near East, but rather drew inspiration from the civilisations of the contemporary Aegean to the west. Even then, the Aegean tradition of writing was not simply borrowed wholesale but adapted in order to create a distinctive Cypriot script that even in its earliest surviving attestations could not be confused with Linear A. As the linguistic landscape changed in the Early Iron Age and later with the arrival of the Greek and Phoenician languages, there were also changes associated with writing: the imported Phoenician script started to play a visible role in the island's landscape, as did a newly developed Cypriot script, commonly known by modern scholars as the Cypriot Syllabary or Cypro-Greek Syllabary and descended

¹ Evans-Pritchard (1934) 24.

from the earlier Cypro-Minoan. This new syllabic system took hold as *the* script in which Cypriot Greek, as well as one or more unidentified local languages, came to be written. For hundreds of years during the 1st millennium BC, the Cypriot Syllabary was used for a wide range of purposes, including royal and official inscriptions, gravestones, religious dedications, graffiti and administrative documents. In short, Cypriots of varying background and status were using this distinctive script both in private and in public, and they were almost certainly engaging with it visually on a day-to-day basis whether consciously (e.g. reading, writing) or not (e.g. walking past a public inscription).

The tenacity of home-bred writing systems has been seen as raising some questions about their motivation, although the usual questions asked are perhaps not the most pertinent. For example, why did Cypriots of the Late Bronze Age shun the cuneiform scripts, widely used in nearby areas, not only in the initial adoption of writing but also as time went on and cuneiform came to be used in international diplomacy and trade around the eastern Mediterranean? Why did Greek speakers on Cyprus in the Early Iron Age ignore the Phoenician consonantal alphabet and develop a script based on the local Cypro-Minoan one? Why did Cypriot Greek speakers during the Iron Age prefer to continue using their syllabic writing system while the Greek alphabet became the script used throughout the rest of the Greek-speaking world? The common way to attempt to answer these questions is to call upon structural concerns or failures of opportunity. For example, it could be suggested in response to the first question above that cuneiform with its hundreds of signs and mixture of syllabograms and logograms was thought to be too unwieldy,² or, taking a different approach, that Cypriots encountered and adopted Aegean writing before they encountered cuneiform. Although such suggestions deserve some consideration (see also [Chapter 1, section 1.6.2](#)), they may be the wrong way of looking at the central question of the distinctiveness of Cypriot writing.

Claims about the motivation for script development have sometimes been used as evidence to support chronological assumptions, for example that the Cypriot Syllabary must have been created before Phoenicians settled on Cyprus, because if Greek speakers had encountered Phoenician first then they would have preferred to adopt their ‘superior scribal system’ – so the fact that they did not do so ‘proves’ that they had not met the Phoenicians yet.³ However, such an assumption overlooks the possibility that the Phoenician consonantal alphabet did not seem superior to a Greek

² E.g. Palaima (1989a) 161–2.

³ E.g. Iacovou (2006) 40, (2008a) 644.

speaker, perhaps because it failed to represent vowel distinctions.⁴ This could have been seen as a significant disadvantage considering the importance of vowels in Greek lexical and morphological distinctions. On the other hand, the Cypriot Syllabary has some different structural disadvantages that presumably derive from Cypro-Minoan, with its larger repertoire of signs that fails to represent several Greek phonemic distinctions (e.g. p/p^h/b or t/t^h/d), all of which are distinguished within the Phoenician script. However, the syllabic script could nevertheless have been preferred over Phoenician because its use of signs incorporating vowels (either consonant + vowel or vowel-only signs) allowed far greater representation of lexical roots and morphological endings.

While neither the syllabic script nor the consonantal alphabet was ideal for representing the Cypriot Greek dialect, the Greek alphabet that had been developed from Phoenician by the 8th century BC would potentially have been much better suited: it maintained a greater range of consonantal distinctions present in the Phoenician script while adapting some other signs to represent vowels with separate signs. However, Cypriots barely show any signs of a desire to adopt the Greek alphabet before the 5th–4th centuries BC, long after its initial creation (an issue addressed in [section 5.3](#) below). This brings us to another assumption that has sometimes been made, that the Cypriot Syllabary was already in place before Cypriot Greek speakers encountered the newly created Greek alphabet. This last claim has also been used to support further arguments about script development, that the Greek alphabet was created in Cyprus itself, but never adopted by locals because they already had their own script.⁵ However, the question of when the later Cypriot Syllabary was adapted and when it ‘took over’ from earlier Cypro-Minoan is not altogether an easy one to answer (as we saw in [Chapter 2](#)), while on the other hand the continuity of writing from the Bronze Age into the Iron Age is striking and suggests a long-term tradition despite the development of some differences in languages represented and in sign repertoire over time.

A better and more economical explanation for the creation and continued use of distinctive Cypriot writing systems, in both the 2nd and 1st millennia BC, is one of deliberate choice, and a choice not based on any perceived relative efficiency of writing systems. Shunning at various stages the cuneiform, Phoenician and Greek alphabetic systems might have been one way of maintaining Cyprus’ independent status as an island that, although it may have had close relations with other areas of the eastern Mediterranean,

⁴ Steele (2013) 95–6.

⁵ Woodard (1997) 218–19.

nevertheless stood apart from them both culturally and politically. Even when Cyprus came under the control of external powers during the 1st millennium, those powers made no impression at all on script use on the island: under Assyrian control, for example, the only written manifestation of Assyrian supremacy found in Cyprus is a stele erected by Sargon II at Kition (707/709 BC), which in fact lists seven Cypriot kings and so attests to local power structures as much as it does Assyrian control.⁶ The Cypriot Syllabary was by this time coming to be the tool of local royal dynasties, and must have acted as a powerful means of marking out a Cypriot political identity.⁷ The use of the syllabic script could further be seen as putting some distance between Greek speakers abroad using the alphabet and the independent, and in many ways quite culturally different, Greek-speaking polities of Cyprus. A similar situation may also apply to the Late Bronze Age. We know from surviving records of international diplomacy that rulers on Cyprus (referred to by the term *Alashiya*) were in fact able to use cuneiform to communicate with other powers around the Mediterranean in the 14th–13th centuries, including Egypt (see Figure 5.1) and Ugarit.⁸ However, again this made no impression on script use on Cyprus itself, and any mastery of cuneiform must have been limited exclusively to external diplomatic use. Despite a willingness to use the

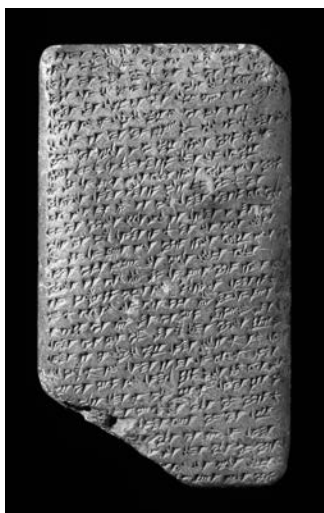


Figure 5.1 Tablet from the Amarna archive sent by the king of *Alashiya* to the Egyptian pharaoh.

⁶ Yon and Malbran-Labat (1995), Yon (2004) no. 4001.

⁷ Iacovou (2013a) 142.

⁸ On the Amarna letters from the king of *Alashiya* to the Egyptian pharaoh, see Moran (1992). On the Ugarit letters mentioning *Alashiya*, see Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 62–3, 139–45.

international cuneiform script (and with it the Akkadian language) for international purposes, the retention of a separate and visibly different writing system used for a range of purposes within Cyprus may have again been a statement of independence: Cyprus was playing a role in eastern Mediterranean politics, but it represented a separate political entity with its own tradition of writing. Similarly, the Egyptians used cuneiform for international diplomacy while retaining their hieroglyphic script.

The aim of this [final chapter](#) is to reach a better understanding of the ways in which Cypriots were using their idiosyncratic writing systems as a stamp of their identity. This offers a better framework for understanding the choices made with respect to writing in ancient Cyprus than the more parochial views that relate these choices to technical properties of the scripts. We can test the assumption that writing and identity are closely linked by examining writing practices both within and outside Cyprus. First we will look at Cypriot inscriptions discovered abroad, in order to investigate whether Cypriots maintained their writing traditions when they were away from the socio-cultural context that usually determined them. We will then move back to Cyprus to look at the slow advance of alphabetic literacy on the island, with inscriptions written wholly or partially in the Greek alphabet making a late appearance and only taking hold in the final years before the Cypriot kingdoms lost their independence and the island became an administrative region of the Ptolemaic empire – a political development that seems to have coincided with the quite sudden disappearance of syllabic and Phoenician writing in Cyprus within the space of one or two centuries. In this way we can try to substantiate to what extent Cypriots' peculiar writing habits were a socially determined interest for ancient Cypriots (cf. the quotation from Evans-Pritchard at the beginning of this chapter concerning interests as selective agents), and a distinctive trait that they intentionally upheld both abroad and at home.

5.2 Cypriots Writing Abroad

5.2.1 The Late Bronze Age: Cypro-Minoan Abroad

Although most surviving Cypro-Minoan inscriptions are confined to Cyprus itself, a small number have been found abroad. The largest concentration of documents is found in the 13th to 12th centuries BC at Ugarit (Ras Shamra), a well-connected city state located in the northern Levant that was home to a variety of languages and scripts. These inscriptions include clay tablets that look quite in keeping with local

cuneiform epigraphic habits, and were found alongside cuneiform documentation, but that use a Cypriot script. The other site yielding a Cypro-Minoan inscription lies not to the east but the west: 12th-century BC Tiryns, located in Argolid of the Peloponnese peninsula. The single inscribed clay ball found there appears to be a typical Cypriot epigraphic custom being practised abroad, rather than an adaptation of Cypriot writing. We are probably dealing with different phenomena at each site.

Potmarks (usually single signs on vases of various types) found at various locations outside Cyprus could also be considered, although the dissemination of these marked vessels must be associated with trade across the eastern Mediterranean rather than with Cypriot epigraphic practice abroad: many marks may have been made by merchants operating out of Cyprus itself (see further [Chapter 3, section 3.2.4](#)).

Ugarit

Nine Cypro-Minoan inscriptions have been found at Ugarit itself, and we may add a further inscription from Lattakia to the material originating from northern Syria. Four of the inscriptions are whole or fragmentary clay tablets (##212, 213, 214, 215), two are clay labels (##210, 211), one is on the edge of a silver bowl (##216), two are on pottery sherds (##243, 251) and one is on a cylinder seal (##217, found at Lattakia).⁹ With only ten inscriptions, it is difficult to be certain what sort of picture of Cypro-Minoan literacy we can build up. Some of the texts could conceivably reflect a completely different situation from some of the others, as a closer examination will show.

The clay tablets are the longest inscriptions, and were found in the archives of private residences of Ugaritan officials rather than the royal palace itself, alongside other documents in Akkadian and Ugaritic cuneiform. The two fragmentary tablets (##213 and 214, the latter broken in two pieces) originate from the residence of Yabninu among cuneiform documents in both Akkadian and Ugaritic recording economic transactions.¹⁰ An almost complete, but slightly damaged, tablet (##212) from the residence of Rašapabu again was found in the same area as legal and economic texts in Akkadian cuneiform, with two scribal exercises in Ugaritic cuneiform also present.¹¹ The final and most complete tablet (##215) was found in the residence of Rap'anu, clearly an important official

⁹ ##210–17 can be found in Olivier (2007) and Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 2. Of the other two, ##243 is found only in Ferrara and ##251 only in Valério (2014).

¹⁰ See Courtois (1990).

¹¹ See Nougayrol (1968b).

in whose private quarters were found a large number of clay tablets containing royal correspondence written in Akkadian cuneiform between the ruler of Ugarit and foreign powers including Karkemish and Egypt, as well as Alashiya (= Cyprus) itself.¹² International correspondence, again involving Alashiya among other locations, appears also in the residence of Urtenu, where both the Cypro-Minoan inscribed clay labels were found in close proximity to other documents, most of which are in Akkadian cuneiform.¹³ All of these documents are ones that correspond closely in type with cuneiform-inscribed documents in use in Ugarit, especially the shape and size of the tablets, one of which has an inscription running along the side of the document that must be a reference to its content and points towards it being filed alongside other tablets (see [Figure 5.2](#)). The context of these documents strongly suggests that they were created in Ugarit for use in Ugarit.¹⁴ Although for the most part it is difficult to try to reconstruct the content of the documents, the interpretation of tablet ##215 as a list of names similar to ones written in cuneiform at the site is convincing (see [Chapter 3](#) at the end of [section 3.2.2](#)).

We are still faced with the question of who was using Cypro-Minoan at Ugarit and why. The tablets may relate to Cypriot affairs, an assumption strengthened by the fact that three of the documents were found in close association with correspondence relating to Alashiya. They are also perhaps more likely to originate from Cypriots living and working in Ugarit than



Figure 5.2 Cypro-Minoan tablet from Ugarit (##212).

¹² See Nougayrol (1968a).

¹³ See Yon and Arnaud (2001) 235–408.

¹⁴ See the discussion in Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 132–45.

from Ugaritans who had mastered the Cypriot script. But why write them in Cypro-Minoan, rather than in cuneiform like the other documents? Ferrara suggests some possible ways of interpreting this deliberate choice: it could be a political statement of Cypriot cultural identity; it could be that the underlying Cypriot language was inextricably linked with the Cypriot script (i.e. use of Cypro-Minoan was seen as obligatory); or it could be that the phonemes of the Cypriot language were thought to be better represented in the Cypriot script (i.e. the use of Cypro-Minoan was seen as more appropriate).¹⁵ However, the last two options still leave us with the question: why use the Cypro-Minoan language at all, and not Akkadian (or even Ugaritic)? This may leave a statement of identity as the most likely explanation, but it would nevertheless require contextualisation. In fact, it has even tentatively been suggested that tablet ##215, plausibly interpreted as a list of names, could be an Ugaritic-language text often using the Ugaritic genitive with the patronymic,¹⁶ which could turn previous assumptions on their head. Could we be dealing with a Cypriot who could speak Ugaritic but used his own native writing system, or a native Ugaritan experimenting with a Cypriot script?

It is helpful to consider the context of the other Cypro-Minoan documents found at Ugarit, to see whether this fits in with the impression given by the tablets and labels. The silver bowl (Figure 5.3) was found on the city's acropolis, near to the Library of the High Priest, pushed into a vase alongside other uninscribed vessels of precious metals. In type, it compares well with inscribed examples of metal bowls found in Cyprus, with its inscription on the bowl's edge (discussed in Chapter 2). However, the three to four signs of the inscription could be seen as a dubious example of Cypro-Minoan writing, with good parallels only for the sign on the far right, which could be Cypro-Minoan sign 102. The sign second from the right, which looks somewhat like a Greek alphabetic capital *phi* Φ (although the inscription is too early for this to be the case), has no convincing parallel. It could be questioned whether this is really an example of Cypriot writing. The fact that it appears on a silver bowl does not have to be a positive indication of Cypriot script, especially given the appearance in Cyprus of a silver bowl with an Ugaritic cuneiform alphabetic inscription found at Hala Sultan Tekke.¹⁷

The other inscriptions look better as examples of Cypro-Minoan. One of the pottery sherds (##243), an inscribed pithos rim from the residence of

¹⁵ Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 141.

¹⁶ Valério (2016) 346–96.

¹⁷ Bordreuil (1983) and Yon (2004) no. 7001.

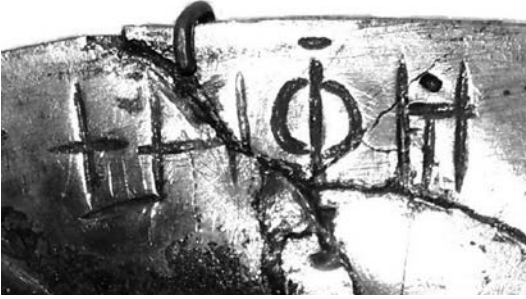


Figure 5.3 Inscribed silver bowl found at Ugarit.

Yabninu (where tablet fragments ##213 and 214 originated), is reported as having a sequence of five Cypro-Minoan signs but the object was reported as missing from Damascus National Museum and cannot be inspected to corroborate the sequence. The other pottery sherd is a fragment of vase handle bearing two Cypro-Minoan signs, but its context is unreported,¹⁸ and it is perhaps likely that it reached Ugarit through trade since its inscription is comparable with many others found on Cypriot vessels. The cylinder seal from Lattakia has a Cypro-Minoan sequence, but as a small and portable item could conceivably have originated from Cyprus itself rather than Ugarit, perhaps owned by a Cypriot living at the city although this is only conjecture.

The tablets and labels found in the residences of Ugaritan officials have a specific context that seems somewhat different from that of the other Cypro-Minoan or possible Cypro-Minoan inscriptions found in or near the city. The only exception is the inscribed pithos rim (##243), which was also found in the residence of a city official, but with so few examples of Cypriot writing it is difficult to assess the significance of this find. The object has not been documented in any detail and is now missing, but it may represent an imported item and so one related with external trade.¹⁹ It seems unlikely that we are dealing with a large population of Cypriots speaking a Cypriot language who were living in Ugarit. If that were the case, we should probably expect to find a broader range of document types comparable with the literary and other ones in Hurrian (a language not local to Ugarit that was written in syllabic cuneiform similar to that used for Akkadian) found at the site; there are even surviving glossaries and vocabulary lists that must have aided bilingual communication between speakers of Hurrian and those of other languages.²⁰ Among the

¹⁸ See Matoian (2012) 155.

¹⁹ Courtois (1990) 136.

²⁰ See Vita (2009).

thousands of clay tablets and other documents found at Ugarit, the Cypro-Minoan documents represent a tiny minority and they must reflect a limited use of the foreign script for official documentation at the city. In contrast, mentions of Cyprus by the name of Alashiya, along with lists of Cypriot personnel (which could also be the content of some of the Cypro-Minoan tablets), are well attested and should be included alongside the considerable evidence for contact between Cyprus and Syria in the Late Bronze Age.²¹ The Cypro-Minoan tablets could indeed reflect experimental use of a Cypriot script on a local document type, perhaps by a resident or visiting Cypriot or even by a local Ugaritan. The wide range of languages and writing systems attested at Ugarit (Akkadian, Ugaritic, Sumerian, Hurrian, Hittite, Egyptian) would suggest that this was an ideal situation in which such an experiment could be conducted and might be tolerated, or even encouraged, by local administrators.

Tiryns

One of the Cypro-Minoan inscriptions found at Tiryns gives a strong impression of Cypriot writing practices carried abroad. The item is a clay ball, a distinctive form of inscription very common among surviving Cypro-Minoan texts (see the discussion in [Chapter 3, section 3.2.3](#)) and absolutely typical of Cypriot epigraphic habit. The three signs on the Tiryns clay ball are palaeographically very close in style to signs in similar inscriptions on Cypriot clay balls. Furthermore, the three-sign sequence, 041-041-097, also appears in the clay cylinder from Enkomi (##097) as well as perhaps a pithos rim from Idalion (##123), which suggests that it may be written in the same language used for those inscriptions.

It is unlikely that the Tiryns example represents a one-off occurrence of the practice of inscribing Cypro-Minoan clay balls at the site because some uninscribed examples were also found, suggesting that it was made and inscribed locally. The excavators also observed that the clay type is more in keeping with local than with Cypriot clay.²² The inscribed and uninscribed clay balls may reflect the presence of Cypriots living in Tiryns and continuing their home-grown epigraphic traditions, which we could potentially interpret as a mark of Cypriot identity in contrast with their new surroundings. The presence of Cypriots would in fact fit in well with other evidence of eastern influence in Tiryns around and following the fall of the Mycenaean palaces, including the appearance of an ivory rod inscribed in

²¹ See e.g. Yon (1980), (1999a).

²² See Vetters (2011).

Ugaritic cuneiform.²³ Again this must have been a situation in which Cypriots abroad were able to, and evidently wished to, continue using their own writing system abroad. Unlike at Ugarit, however, at Tiryns they may have found themselves practising the technology of writing in an environment where it was quite scarce, if we are right to assume that the use of Linear B at Tiryns as at other Mycenaean sites was restricted to administration, and that literacy must have declined sharply and suddenly when the palaces fell.²⁴

The use of Cypro-Minoan at Tiryns is also attested in the form of potmarks, usually single signs incised on the handles of storage vessels, of which a notable concentration appears at the site.²⁵ This in itself suggests contact between Tiryns and Cyprus in the form of trade, the specific context in which the practice of potmarking is assumed to arise. Recently a longer inscription incised onto a jug handle has also been found, consisting of three syllabic signs (087-050-005) followed by what looks like a word divider.²⁶ This longer inscription appears on a vessel that is of local production, and again must indicate Cypriots using their distinctive script while living or working abroad.

5.2.2 The Archaic to Hellenistic Periods: The Cypriot Syllabary Abroad

In moving on to consider the use by Cypriots of their native syllabic writing when abroad during the 1st millennium BC, we face two immediate advantages compared to the survey of the Late Bronze Age: a much larger number of inscriptions (with hundreds found abroad) and a deciphered script, the Cypriot Syllabary, giving access to the content of many of the inscriptions. This allows a much more detailed picture to emerge of what Cypriots at this time were writing while they were journeying or living in foreign lands, which in turn means that we can attempt to reconstruct the motivations behind their epigraphic habits with more accuracy.

Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions have been found in a variety of countries, from as far as Italy in the west to the Levantine coast in the east, and from Cilicia in the north to Nubia in the south. The largest number by far originate from Egypt, where numerous graffiti, mostly dating from the 4th century BC, show us that Cypriots were keen to mark their names on local

²³ Cohen, Maran and Vetters (2010).

²⁴ See Steele (forthcoming).

²⁵ See Hirschfeld (1996) 294–7, (1999) 54–9 and Olivier (1988).

²⁶ ##246. See Davis, Maran and Wirghová (2014).

monuments while they were travelling abroad, often probably to work as mercenaries in the armies of Egyptian pharaohs. The graffiti are particularly illuminating because they are written on immovable monumental buildings and so can be studied in their original context. However, other inscription types, many on smaller and more portable items, can also be observed in several locations around the Mediterranean, each one often telling a different story. Some of these are remarkably early texts.

Early inscriptions

Some of the earliest surviving inscriptions written in the Cypriot Syllabic script were found at locations outside Cyprus (discussed also in [Chapter 2](#)). Potentially the earliest of these inscriptions is a pottery sherd found at Kilise Tepe in Cilicia, whose context dates it to the 9th or 8th century BC. However, with only three signs, one of which is not easily identified as a Cypriot Syllabic sign, it is impossible to be certain that this is a Cypriot Syllabic inscription ([Figure 5.4](#)); one of the signs also seems to incorporate an otherwise unknown combination of both incision and painted dots. It could reflect an early stage of the new script, perhaps even using a sign that was later lost from the script's repertoire. On the other hand, however, it is not impossible that it is instead a reflex of some Anatolian writing system, and in fact there are parallels for some of its signs in the later attested alphabets used for local languages such as Sidetic.²⁷ It must be considered as

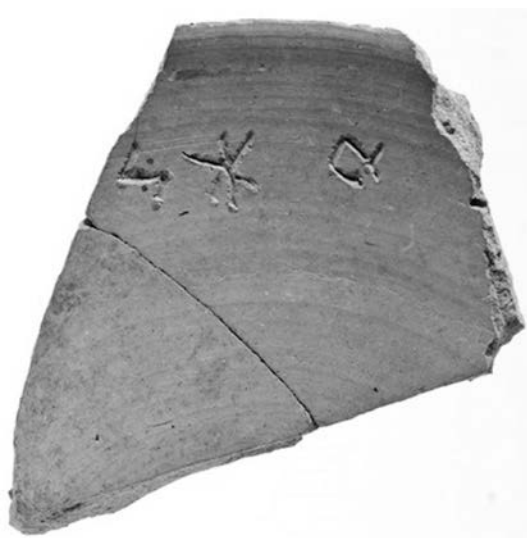


Figure 5.4 Early inscription from Cilicia, possibly Cypriot Syllabic.

²⁷ See Egetmeyer and Steele ([2010](#)). Also Egetmeyer ([2010a](#)) vol. 2 Cilicia 1.

an uncertain example of the Cypriot Syllabary, although the appearance of the first two signs is in keeping with a theory of Cypriot origin.

Of the texts that can be identified as Cypriot Syllabic with certainty, probably the earliest is an inscribed seal originating from Cilicia, whose exact provenance is unknown. The seal's text, when impressed on a soft material, reads from left to right and from bottom to top (Figure 5.5 is a drawing of the impression):

1. *ma-to-te-?-?*
2. *ti-we-i-pi-lo-tō-?*

The last sign of line 2 is too damaged to read, but can be guessed to be a *sa*, so that the sense carries on from line 2 to line 1: *Diweiphilō tō [sā]ma tode*, 'Of Diweiphilos, this [is the] sign.'²⁸ The direction of writing is very unusual although not completely unparalleled in the corpus of Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions,²⁹ and could perhaps reflect experimentation in written form. Another interpretation might be that it was accidental: the engraver knew that it had to be engraved in reverse in order to be read in the correct direction when impressed (i.e. right-to-left on the object so that the impression would read left-to-right), and perhaps also reversed the order of lines out of confusion.

The deliberately decorative nature of this inscription is also striking. At the end of line 1 where the inscription ends (the right end of the first line in Figure 5.5), two decorative symbols have been added to fill an area that would otherwise have been blank. These are not writing: like the cross-

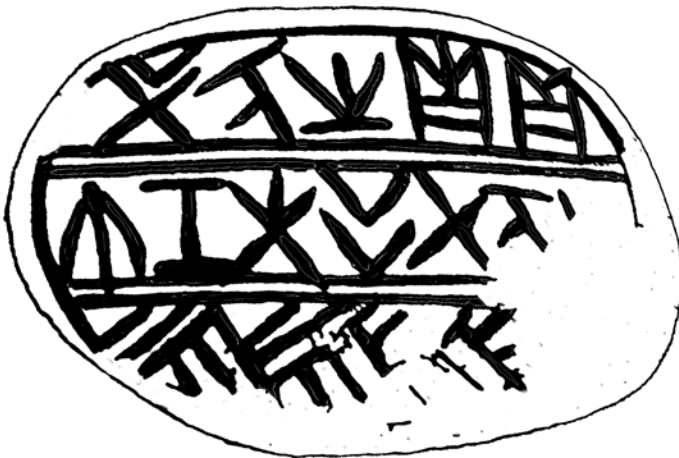


Figure 5.5 Inscribed seal from Cilicia.

²⁸ See Egetmeyer (2001), (2010a) vol. 2 845 (Cilicia 13), Casabonne and Egetmeyer (2002).

²⁹ Cf. Mitford and Masson (1983) no. 40 from Rantidi-Paphos, 6th century BC.

hatching filling the extra line at the bottom, they are only intended to fill space. These two symbols are made to be very similar in size to the written signs, and their complex, angular nature does not look at all out of place alongside elements of the syllabic script. However, it could be argued that the inscriber has deliberately avoided any shape that could be misinterpreted as a syllabic sign so that the end of the text is more obvious.

Another of the early inscriptions can be seen as incorporating text into a decorative arrangement by placing written signs across the foot of a bronze tripod stand, shaped like a lion's paw. The text is situated between decorative line bands, and reads from right to left *e-re-ma-i-[-jo*, to be completed as Ermaiō, a genitive marking the name of the man from whom the dedicated object originates (Figure 5.6). The tripod was found at the entrance to the temenos at the sanctuary site of Delphi, showing the script making an appearance in the context of international religious practices at about the end of the 8th century BC.

The last of the three early inscriptions is found on an 'SOS' amphora, so named because of the typical decoration of these pieces of pottery, consisting of wavy S-shaped lines on either side of a circle. It was found at Mende in Chalcidice, a Euboean colony on the northern coast of the Aegean Sea. Although it could date as early as the late 8th century BC, any date between the 8th and early 6th centuries would be possible for this vase type in its context as a vessel used in the trade of olive oil in and around Attica.³⁰ The inscription reads *[-la-si te-mi 'se*, probably preserving an abbreviated personal name beginning with the element Themī.³¹ A vase fragment found at Policoro in Italy, dated to the 7th–6th centuries BC, carries an almost identical inscription: *?-la-si-te-mi-[-*, but the significance of this repeated sequence is difficult to reconstruct, as is the significance of its geographical diffusion.



Figure 5.6 Inscribed lion's paw from a decorative tripod from Delphi.

³⁰ See Vokotopoulou and Christidis (1995).

³¹ See Karnava (2013) 160–3. Also Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Greece 2 and Italy 1.

Greece, Cilicia and the Levant

Before moving on to the more coherent set of inscriptions in Egypt, it is worth mentioning the varied inscriptions dating between the 6th and 3rd centuries BC found in areas around the eastern Mediterranean. To the west, two Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions were found in Athens.³² One of these is on a pottery sherd dating from the 5th century, and records only a name, but a distinctively Cypriot one: *ku-po-ro-ta-mo*, ‘of Kyprodamos’. The other is dated to the early 5th century or earlier and consists of a fragment of bronze bowl with a three-sign sequence surviving, perhaps to be completed as *[pa-si]-le-wo-se*, ‘of the king’. As small and portable items, it is difficult to comment on the context in which they were inscribed.

To the north, the discovery of a coin hoard at Meydancikkale in Cilicia provides us with some further inscriptions. The hoard probably originated from the garrison of a Ptolemaic fortress, and dates to the mid-3rd century BC. To contrast with the very early examples of the Cypriot Syllabary appearing abroad, these coins are among the last surviving evidence of the script’s use before it disappears from the epigraphic record altogether. Although the inscribed items are coins, their inscriptions are not the names of kings struck at the same time as the coins themselves, but have been added by hand after striking.³³ They consist of whole or abbreviated names, some Greek or probably Greek, at least one Semitic and some too obscure to be certain. The one certain Semitic name reads *ra-pa-e-lo-se*, *Raphaelos*, which adds Greek inflection to the Semitic base. One of the coins bears an abbreviated name alongside an ethnic indicator: *zo-ke-ti*, ‘Zo ... the Kitian’; as with the amphora stamps bearing the sequence *ke-ti*, we might wonder whether this is an abbreviated Greek ethnic adjective, or simply a transcription of the Phoenician name for the city of Kition, which appears in Phoenician texts as *KTY* (see [Chapter 4, section 4.2.2](#) s.v. Kition).

Some further disparate Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions originate from the Levantine coastal plain to the east.³⁴ A single sign on a pottery fragment from Leukos Limen and a stamped pottery handle with a longer but obscure sequence from Tel Soukas suggest that Cypriot marked pottery was being circulated in the late 4th to 3rd centuries BC, and another piece with an amphora stamp dated to the 4th century from Ras El Bassit (Poseideion)

³² Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Greece 3 and 4, Karnava (2013) 165–7.

³³ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Cilicia 2–12, and see also Casabonne (2004) 151–65. Coins found abroad are otherwise excluded from this survey because, as items struck in Cyprus and dispersed through trade and other mechanisms, they tell us nothing about Cypriots using their distinctive writing system while visiting foreign lands. The Meydancikkale coins, however, present a different case.

³⁴ See Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Syria 14–19.

further this impression. Also from Syria but of unknown provenance are two inscribed scarabs of the 6th century, with abbreviated Greek names. A 4th-century cone, again of unknown provenance but originating from Syria, bears an obscure four-sign sequence. Although they point towards contact between Cyprus and the Levant, these are items that could have been inscribed on the island, especially in the case of the stamp marks, which probably originate from merchants based in Cyprus and branding their wares with the distinctive Cypriot script.

Some sites in Lebanon give better evidence of the Cypriot Syllabary being used abroad in the form of religious dedications.³⁵ A 5th/4th century stele found in Sidon was dedicated to a goddess by a man named *sa-ma-tu-nu-se*, a name of uncertain etymology. The inscription follows the typical Cypriot custom of adding a religious formula at the end, *i-tu-ka-i* ‘to fortune’, a feature that we saw to be common in some of the bilingual inscriptions discussed in [Chapter 4](#). Another dedication, this one on a fragment of bone found at Tel Dor of similar date, specifies only the name of the dedicant, Aristagoras, as well as what is probably his father’s name, reconstructed as *Phuwator vel sim*. Finally, at Sarepta, a damaged stone of the 4th century bears a digraphic dedication to Asclepius, with the name of the dedicant preserved in the Greek alphabetic half (Timōn son of Tim...) followed by ΑΣΚΑΠΙΩΙ, which leaves out the expected -λ-; the Cypriot Syllabic part beneath is more damaged and does not have the dedicant’s name but does preserve the /l/ in]-?-*sa-ka-la-pi-o-i*.³⁶ The missing -λ- in the alphabetic half could suggest that the author was more comfortable using the Cypriot script than the more internationally recognisable Greek alphabet, which he placed first perhaps because of its accessibility or international prestige. The text reflects a practice of digraphic inscription that was beginning to take hold at home in Cyprus at this time, which will be discussed further in [section 5.3](#).

Egypt

The Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions from Egypt are the most fruitful to study in terms of Cypriot epigraphic practice abroad, especially the ones from Abydos and Karnak. We have large numbers of texts coming from a consistent context because they are engraved on Egyptian buildings, sometimes collections by different authors that we can assume were present at around the same time. There are also a few smaller and more portable

³⁵ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Phoenicia 20, 23, 21 (= O. Masson (1961/83) no. 369d, (1994), (1961/83) no. 369e respectively).

³⁶ See also Daly (1980), O. Masson (1982).

finds whose contexts are less easy to determine,³⁷ and three examples of inscriptions that represent religious or funerary practice by Cypriots in Egypt: two stelai bearing epitaphs (a longer but damaged one from Saqqara and one with only a short personal name from Gebel Abou Fodah), and a statuette with a dedication consisting of another personal name.³⁸ However, it is the graffiti that give some scope for a more detailed investigation.

Graffiti have been found at several sites and tend to consist of a name ('X'), or a name with ethnic affiliation ('X from Y'), or sometimes a short sentence ('I am X from Y'). More loquacious inscriptions are very rare, although one found on a pillar at Abydos perhaps sheds some light on the practice of leaving graffiti on Egyptian monuments:³⁹

pi-la-no ' o-wo-ro-to-ro-?-q-o[...] -sa-?-?-e-wi-te ' ka-se ' e-ta-we-sa-to-?-?-e

'Philanos son of W ... has seen and admired'

This places the tradition of graffiti in the context of tourism, not perhaps in the modern sense but certainly with some appreciation for the ancient splendour of Egyptian architecture that was an object of wonder for inhabitants of the Mediterranean throughout the 1st millennium BC. Rutherford suggests in connection with the inscription cited above that the use of the verb *e-te-wa-sa-to*, which is also seen in some Greek alphabetic graffiti left by Ionian visitors, could indicate a specifically religious act in the context of pilgrimage to the ancient site.⁴⁰ One only has to compare Herodotus' long excursus on Egyptian customs and monuments in Book 2 of his *Histories* to see the fascination they held for the wider Mediterranean world, a fact that is also corroborated by the vast range of graffiti in different languages and writing systems over the ages on these buildings: contemporary or near-contemporary with the 4th-century Cypriot graffiti, for example, are further texts in alphabetic Greek, Phoenician, Aramaic and Carian.⁴¹ It is unsurprising given this context of tourism that even the Great Pyramid itself, most famous of all Egyptian monuments, has a Cypriot graffito featuring the names of two individuals (Figure 5.7, reading from right to left): (1) *ka-ra-ta-to-ro-se ' o-sa-ta-si-no* (2) *te-mi-to-i ' mo-ra-to-ro ' (Kratandros son of Stasinos, Themitō son of Morandros).*⁴²

³⁷ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Egypt 1, 2, 3.

³⁸ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Egypt 5, 8, 7.

³⁹ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Egypt 14, and O. Masson (1961/83) no. 379.

⁴⁰ Rutherford (2003) 178.

⁴¹ In fact, the Carian graffiti from Egypt make up a considerable proportion of the surviving texts in the Carian language: see Adiego (2007) 30–128, where they are transliterated and accompanied by line drawings. On Greeks in Egypt, see also Vittmann (2003) 194–235.

⁴² Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Egypt 4, O. Masson (1961/83) no. 371.

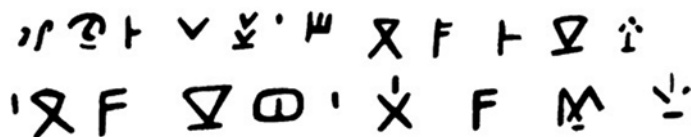


Figure 5.7 Cypriot graffiti on a block of the Great Pyramid.

At least some of the Cypriot graffiti from Egypt, like the Carian ones, originate from mercenaries who were in Egypt specifically for the purpose of serving in the armies of Egyptian pharaohs. We know from historical testament that there were Cypriot mercenaries already in the time of Cambyses (Herodotus 3.19). Most of the graffiti, however, are likely to be a little later, probably from the time of the pharaohs Achoris and Nectanebo, whom we know were in contact with king Evagoras of Salamis on Cyprus (Diodorus 15.3, 15.29). It is impossible to estimate how many of the Egyptian texts originate from mercenaries and how many could have been written by travellers present in Egypt for other purposes. The set of graffiti on the walls of the temple of Achoris at Karnak appear to have been made by a group all present at the site at the same time (see below), who could plausibly be hypothesised to be a group of mercenaries serving in a pharaoh's army. Other graffiti are more difficult to assess because their contexts are more diverse.

As well as the single Cypriot graffiti on the Great Pyramid, there are other monuments where isolated Cypriot graffiti occur.⁴³ One is at the tomb of Amenmesses in the Valley of the Kings, where numerous Greek alphabetic and Latin graffiti have been found but only one Cypriot Syllabic. Another appears at the temple of Tuthmosis III, located at Wadi Halfa in Nubia (near the border of Sudan), the southernmost surviving Cypriot Syllabic inscription. Some further inscriptions carved on rock in the region of Shatt El-Saba El-Rigal can be also added to the list, occurring close to other graffiti in alphabetic Greek, Carian and Aramaic.

At Abydos, numerous Cypriot graffiti have been found, of which one comes from the temple of Ramesses II, while 45 more are found in the temple of Seti I.⁴⁴ The inscriptions often encroach on or are placed between decorative elements of the pillars and walls of the temples, like those written in other languages and scripts, as can be seen in the example in [Figure 5.8](#). This text, reading from right to left, is found on one of the pillars of the

⁴³ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Egypt 55 (O. Masson (1961/83) no. 420), 141 (O. Masson (1961/83) no. 455), 139 (O. Masson (1961/83) no. 454), 140 respectively.

⁴⁴ Ramesses II: Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Egypt 54, O. Masson (1961/83) no. 419. Seti I: Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Egypt 9–53, O. Masson (1961/83) nos. 374–418.



Figure 5.8 Cypriot Greek graffito from the temple of Seti I, Abydos.

temple of Seti I and shows well how the graffiti are sometimes placed in line with and around pre-existing elements of the decoration; traces of further graffiti can be seen at the top and bottom of the image. Although some of the signs are difficult to read, the first line clearly contains the name *e-u-ru-te-mi* (Eurythemis) followed by an incomplete patronymic and perhaps a further word that may have been an ethnic giving the writer's city of origin.⁴⁵

Most of the Cypriot graffiti at Abydos are written in Greek, which is to say that they record Greek names with Greek inflection, and occasionally whole Greek sentences as in the example we saw above specifying the act of seeing and admiring, or simply a statement 'I am X' (*e-mi* ...). However, one of the graffiti is a Cypriot Syllabic text in a non-Greek language, and contains the well-attested Eteocypriot word *a-na* (Figure 5.9): reading right to left, *a-na* 'a-mo-ta' a-sa-ti-ri. We cannot understand the content of this inscription, since we know so little about the Eteocypriot language (see Chapter 3, section 3.3.1), but we might assume that it contains a name since this is an ubiquitous feature of the graffiti in Egypt. We can note however that it does not contain the Eteocypriot patronymic suffix *-o-ko-o-*, and so presumably contains only the author's name and not his father's, despite

⁴⁵ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Egypt 11, O. Masson (1961/83) no. 376.



Figure 5.9 Eteocypriot graffiti from the temple of Seti I, Abydos.

the fact that patronymics are frequent in the Egyptian graffiti. We can assume that the first word, *a-na*, is not part of the name but its meaning remains unknown despite its relative frequency in other known Eteocypriot inscriptions. One or both of the other words could be the name, and would presumably be of Eteocypriot etymology unless *a-sa-ti-ri* represents a Greek name, perhaps in *Astr-* (although names beginning with this element are rare in Greek⁴⁶), or even a shortened form of a name in *Aristo-*, which we know from other inscriptions seems to have been simplified in Eteocypriot to *Arto-* (*a-ra-to-wa-na-ka-so-ko-o-se* linked with *Aristo(wa)nax* in the Amathus Bilingual and *a-ra-to-ke-ne-so-ko-o-* for Aristogenes in another inscription) or *Asto-* (*a-sa-to-wa-na-ka-so-ko-?* again for Aristowanax).⁴⁷ Beyond these hypothetical suggestions, the structure of the inscription remains mysterious.

At Karnak the situation is somewhat different from that at Abydos. The sanctuary site of Karnak features a vast complex of ancient buildings and temples, of which one could say that the small building dedicated to the pharaoh Achoris (who reigned in the early 4th century BC) is one of the least grand and attractive to tourists. Furthermore, at the time when the graffiti were written, the building would have been quite new, again making it somewhat less impressive than most Egyptian monuments that were hundreds or even thousands of years old by the time ancient Cypriots visited them (the Great Pyramid, for example, dates to the middle of the 3rd millennium BC, and the temple of Seti I at Abydos to the 13th century). However, it gives a good opportunity to observe a set of Cypriot graffiti in an isolated context. Unlike at Abydos, where Cypriot graffiti vie for space with graffiti in other languages and scripts, the Cypriot inscriptions marking the walls of the temple of Achoris at Karnak have only each other to compete with. The graffiti rarely encroach on each other, and although they are not spaced out neatly they do accommodate nearby texts, as can be seen in the section of wall shown in [Figure 5.10](#). This indicates that the graffiti were being made by a group of people who were all present at the building at the same time, with the inscribing of the texts taking place as a group activity, which in turn is probably best explained by hypothesising that the group

⁴⁶ Statistics from Fraser, Matthews et al. (1987–).

⁴⁷ Steele (2013) 144, 152.

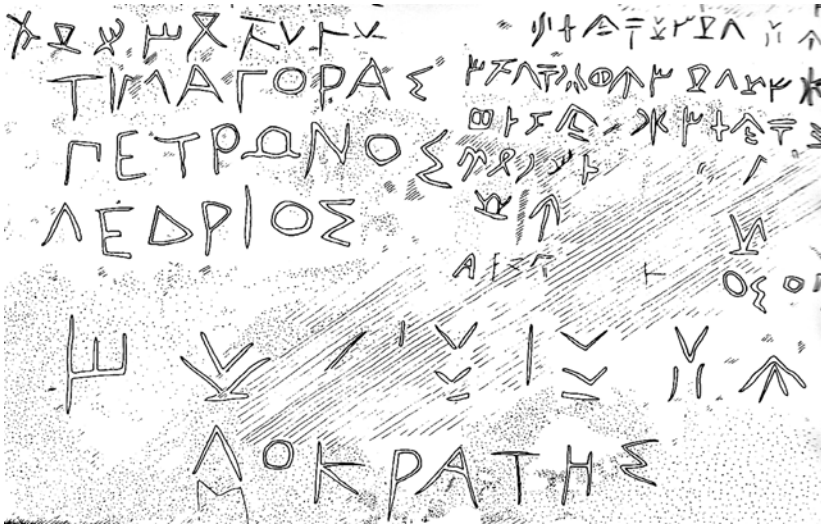


Figure 5.10 Section of wall with graffiti, temple of Achoris, Karnak.

consisted of mercenaries stationed together at Karnak.⁴⁸ This seems much more likely than a series of individual visits by Cypriots to the same, relatively unremarkable building.

The authors of the Karnak graffiti also show some attachment to the epigraphic traditions of writing in the Cypriot Syllabary. Most are written in bold signs, showing confident usage of the syllabic script, and are in different handwriting, indicating that a number of these mercenaries must have been literate. The majority are in the Common Cypriot Syllabary, the variety of the script that was in use across most of Cyprus and by most of the city kingdoms, but five of them are in the Paphian Cypriot Syllabary, which was usually confined to Paphos and nearby areas and was the official script of the kingdom of Paphos. While the Common syllabary reads from right to left, the Paphian one reads from left to right, and differs in the forms of some of its signs. Four of the five individuals writing in the Paphian syllabary also include an ethnic, specifying that they come from the city of Paphos: *pa-pi-o-se*, ‘Paphian’.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, the individuals who were writing in the Common syllabary never state that they are Paphian, and where ethnics are used they come most often from Ledra or Salamis. The use of ethnics to specify a home city, combined with the use of the ‘correct’ form of the syllabic script for their local areas, shows not only that their

⁴⁸ O. Masson (1981a) 254–5.

⁴⁹ The sequence *pa-pi-o-se* appears in Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Egypt 112, 113, 114, 128 (= O. Masson (1981a) nos. 42, 43, 44, 55). The one without it is Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Egypt 126 (= O. Masson (1981a) no. 53).

local writing traditions were important to this group of Cypriots but also that these traditions still mattered even when they were abroad in foreign lands. Strikingly, some of the graffiti on the walls of the temple of Achoris use not the Cypriot Syllabic script but the Greek alphabet, even though they all seem to originate from Cypriots, which is stated explicitly in some of the texts: we find both *ΒΑΣΑΜΩΝ ΦΙΛΟΔΗΜΟΥ ΛΕΔΡΙΟΣ* and *ΤΙΜΑΓΟΡΑΣ ΠΕΤΡΩΝΟΣ ΛΕΔΡΙΟΣ* (the latter visible in [Figure 5.10](#) on the left), specifying in both cases that the individuals (one with a Phoenician name, Balsamōn, the other with a Greek one, Timagoras) are from the Cypriot city of Ledra.⁵⁰ One individual seems to have been particularly keen to experiment with writing, Philokreōn son of Timas, a man from Salamis: he wrote his name once in the Common syllabary, once in the alphabet and then again in a digraphic inscription with versions in the syllabary and the alphabet ([Figure 5.11](#)).⁵¹

We can ask why these Cypriots were using the alphabet, especially in the case of Philokreōn who was clearly proficient in the home-grown Cypriot Syllabary as well as this international Greek writing system. In his case at least, and probably for the others, it cannot be a matter of competency and

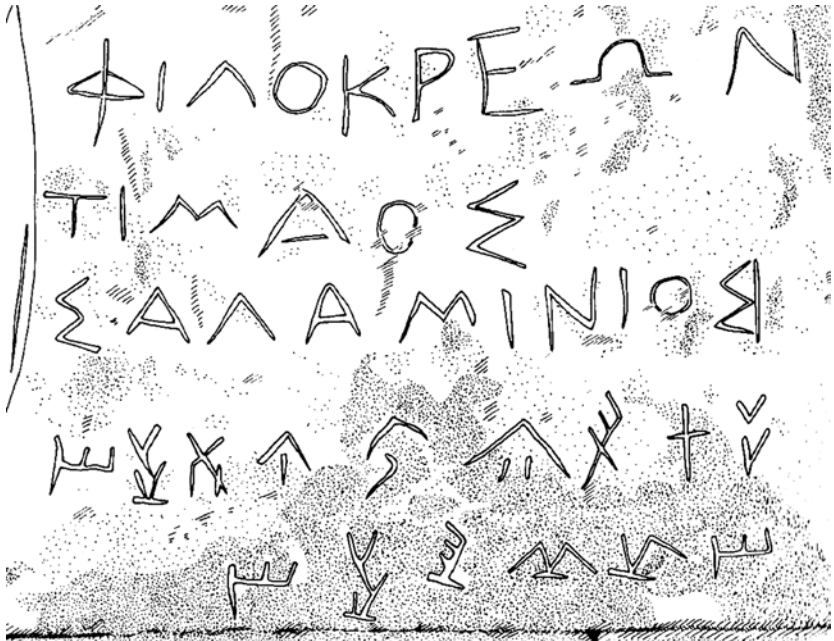


Figure 5.11 Digraphic graffito, temple of Achoris, Karnak.

⁵⁰ The alphabetic graffiti are O. Masson (1981a) 1–5a.

⁵¹ See O. Masson (1981a) 260–5 (nos. 2, 2a, 7, 15).

must be a matter of choice. One obvious possible reason behind the choice to use the alphabet could be that while they were abroad in Egypt these Cypriots were aiming to display their names to a wider audience, knowing that the Cypriot Syllabary was unlikely to be understood by non-Cypriots. In fact, we might equally ask why the majority of Cypriots recording their names at Karnak and other Egyptian locations chose to use their archaic-looking and inaccessible Cypriot script: was it because it was the only script they knew how to use, and/or was using it a part of the process of marking their name and identity on Egyptian monuments? The ethnics they frequently used marked them as residents of one Cypriot city or another, but this unique writing system marked them out as inhabitants of the island of Cyprus.⁵²

The choices made by the authors of Cypriot inscriptions abroad inevitably raise further questions. In order to assess what kind of choice someone is making when they select one writing system or another, we also need to consider what options were available to them when they made the choice. Furthermore, just as an individual can make different choices about language and onomastics in one context or another, as we saw in [Chapter 4](#) with the bilingual inscriptions, it is possible that an individual could perceive one writing system as suitable for one situation and another for another. The [next section](#) sets this in context by considering the presence of the Greek alphabet on Cyprus: when did it appear, and when and how did it become a viable alternative option to using the distinctively Cypriot syllabic script?

5.3 The Greek Alphabet in Cyprus

5.3.1 First Appearances

The Greek alphabet was adapted from the Phoenician consonantal alphabet probably in or slightly before the 8th century BC, the period in which its first surviving inscriptions are attested. Already by the 8th and 7th centuries, alphabetic texts were appearing in Aegina, Athens, Calymnos (near Halicarnassus), Corinth, Crete, Delos, Etruria (in Italy), Euboea, Ithaca, Phrygia (these ones often thought of as a separate alphabet closely related to the Greek), Pithekoussai (a Euboean colony off the coast of Italy), Rhodes, Samos, Smyrna, Thebes, Thera – in short, alphabetic writing was

⁵² An important comparison can be made here in connection with the use of city ethnics in Cypriot inscriptions but the use of the element *Kupro-* or *-kupro-* ('Cyprus') in a number of Cypriot names. Issues of local and island identity are discussed also in [Chapter 4](#).

diffused very widely and very quickly around Greece and the wider Mediterranean.⁵³ Despite this broad distribution, however, no early Greek alphabetic texts have been found in Cyprus. The earliest known examples of the alphabet appearing in Cyprus belong to the late 7th and 6th centuries BC, some 100–200 years after the script's invention. The earliest ones are very brief inscriptions found at Salamis, written on Attic amphorae, that are unlikely to be reflexes of local alphabetic literacy.⁵⁴ The first examples of more lasting alphabetic writing in the 6th century are isolated examples that are also, crucially, digraphic: they include the Cypriot Syllabic script as well as the alphabet. The comparatively late date of the earliest Greek alphabetic inscriptions in Cyprus weighs against suggestions that the island played some role in the development of the alphabet from Phoenician (which had been present on the island since the 9th century,⁵⁵ hence providing the opportunity for Greek–Phoenician bilingualism considered necessary to the creation of the new script).⁵⁶

One of the two 6th-century inscriptions is a gravestone from the area around Polis, the modern city nearest to the location of ancient Marion. Its exact context is unknown because it was found by a local and its location was never recorded, but it is thought to originate from a cemetery of the ancient city. It consists of a plain rectangular block of stone, with the word *ΚΑΣΙΓΝΗΤΑΣ* ‘of the sister’ written across the front, and down the side a column of Cypriot Syllabic signs reading from top to bottom *ka-si-ke-ne-ta*. The dating of the inscription is based on the forms of the alphabetic letters, which appear close to the alphabet in use in Knidos in western Anatolia and include a three-bar sigma and square eta that suggest a later 6th-century date.⁵⁷ The genitive is used in the alphabetic part of the inscription, but the Cypriot inscription omits the final *-s* and should be spelt *ka-si-ke-ne-ta-se* if it also used the genitive case, so could be in the nominative; on the other hand, it may be that the genitive was intended but the final *-s* was omitted through unfamiliarity with the spelling rules of the Cypriot Syllabary. This latter possibility, and the apparent link with alphabetic letter forms in use in Knidos, could perhaps point towards a non-Cypriot origin for the author of the inscription. The lack of a name is also mysterious, considering that this is the epitaph of a deceased girl, and could suggest that she died before being named.⁵⁸

⁵³ See Steele ([forthcoming](#)).

⁵⁴ Pouilloux, Roesch and Marcillet-Jaubert (1987) nos. 354, 355, 356, 357c, 357d.

⁵⁵ See [Chapter 2, section 2.3](#).

⁵⁶ Suggested to different degrees in Carpenter (1938), Heubeck (1979), Woodard (1997), (2010).

⁵⁷ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Marion 83, O. Masson (1961/83) no. 164, Jeffery (1990) 346, 352.

⁵⁸ Mitford (1960) 180.

The second digraphic text dating to the 6th century comes from Golgoi on the other side of the island, and is inscribed on the decorative capital of a funerary stele featuring two lions facing away from each other. The sculpture is typical of Cypriot decorative funerary monuments of the 7th–6th centuries that combine some oriental elements in their decoration (Myres’ ‘Mixed Oriental Style’⁵⁹). The inscription is on an otherwise undecorated band underneath the lions and above some stylised wings. At the left-hand end the alphabetic text reads *KAPYΞEMI* (*kāruξ ēmi*, ‘I am Karyx’), and on the right-hand end reading from right to left to balance the alphabetic half is the syllabic text reading *ka-ru-xe-e-mi* (Figures 5.12 and 5.13). The text is closely connected with the decoration of the piece, with two halves mirroring the composition of the lions above, but it is not very neatly written. The alphabetic signs are also in keeping with a 6th-century date and look similar to letter forms found in Rhodes of a similar period. The syllabic signs are mostly unremarkable, although in some cases are



Figure 5.12 Digraphic capital from Golgoi.

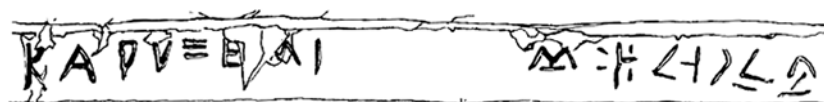


Figure 5.13 Inscription on the digraphic capital from Golgoi.

⁵⁹ Myres (1914) 241. See also O. Masson (1961/83) no. 260 (= Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Golgoi 1).

hastily written (e.g. the *ru*), but the use of *xe* here stands out as quite an early example of this sign: *xe* seems to be a later addition to the Cypriot Syllabary and is not based on an earlier Cypro-Minoan sign as far as we know. The creation of optional signs representing the consonant cluster /ks/ (*xa* and *xe*), which were not necessary given that the clusters could be spelt with two separate syllabic signs, has been assumed to relate to the frequency of /ks/ clusters in the final syllable of Greek words.⁶⁰ However, we could also consider the possibility of influence from the Greek alphabet, some variants of which also had an ‘unnecessary’ sign to represent /ks/, like the variant with the sign *xi* Ξ used in this Cypriot inscription.⁶¹

The choice to include the Greek alphabet in the inscription from Golgoi does not appear to be motivated by the involvement of non-Cypriot individuals, as the one from Marion may have been. The sculptural style in particular looks very much in keeping with local traditions, and the author was familiar enough with the Cypriot Syllabary to know to use the quite rare *xe* sign. It also conforms to the usual orthographic tendency in Cypriot Syllabic writing to maintain the lexical boundary between *e-mi* and the preceding word (i.e. spelling out the sequence with five signs with the e-vowel of *xe* as a dummy vowel, *ka-ru-xe-e-mi* = *kāru* | *ēmi*, rather than using only four signs with the e-vowel of *xe* available to spell the beginning of *ēmi*, **ka-ru-xe-mi*), again suggesting familiarity with the use of the syllabic script.⁶² This makes it more difficult to account for the presence of the Greek alphabet in this relatively early inscription, but the fact that the alphabetic text has its closest parallels in Rhodian inscriptions could be telling: of all the Greek islands, Rhodes is the one closest to Cyprus and contact between the two islands is quite possible. The inclusion of this script, in this period probably foreign-looking from a Cypriot perspective, could have added an element of the exotic to the monument, as well as allowing a text in two halves mirroring the image it accompanies.

A third inscription of similar date can be added here, incised on the base of an Attic cup found in Tomb 51 of the necropolis of Idalion, and probably to

⁶⁰ E.g. Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 1 §§245, 252. The consonant cluster /ks/ was sometimes spelt with a series of two signs, *kV-sV* (e.g. in the name *pa-ra-ka-sa-to-ro* *Prāksandrō*, which could theoretically have been spelt with the letter *xa* as **pa-ra-xa-to-ro*), but usually only for word-internal sequences. It is likely that the x-series of signs in the Cypriot Syllabary was not a full series since only the signs *xa* and *xe* are attested, and there are examples of /ksi/ and /kso/ sequences where a *xi* or *xo* could have been used if they existed (see Egetmeyer (2006)).

⁶¹ ‘Red’ variants of the Greek alphabet used a different sign for a /ks/ cluster, namely X (including an ancestor of the Roman alphabet, hence X for /ks/ in many modern alphabets).

⁶² A word divider is sometimes used to separate *e-mi* and sometimes not. Counter-examples are very rare, e.g. O. Masson (1961/83) no. 196c: *pi-lo-ta-o-se-mi* for *P^hilotāos ēmi*, where the e-vowel of *se* is used to spell the beginning of *ēmi*.

be assigned to the 6th century.⁶³ This one is not digraphic and features only the Greek alphabet, reading ΖΩΕΟΣΗΜΙ ‘I belong to Zōēs.’ It is not impossible that the inscription, like the object on which it appears, could have originated from outside Cyprus. On the other hand, the fact that the name Zōēs is also attested in the Cypriot onomastic record, written as *zo-we-se* in two Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions from Abydos in Egypt, could suggest that the graffito was added on the island and represents a local Cypriot using the Greek alphabet.⁶⁴

5.3.2 The 5th–4th Centuries BC

The next appearances of the Greek alphabet belong to the 5th and 4th centuries BC, during which period a striking new use for the script begins to emerge: it became a tool of royal dynasties in inscriptions relating to the administration of Cypriot city kingdoms. The first examples of the new usage of the alphabet on Cyprus occur towards the end of the 5th century BC and beginning of the 4th at Salamis, located in the east of Cyprus not far from Golgoi. One is a very fragmentary digraphic inscription of which very little text survives,⁶⁵ while the others are coins issued by King Evagoras I of Salamis at some point during his reign, which lasted from 411 to 374/3 BC. Unusually for the ruler of a Cypriot city kingdom during this period, we have good external evidence for the major events of Evagoras’ reign, in particular through a speech of the Attic orator Isocrates. Isocrates presented him as an example of good rulership for his own son, who went on to reign as King Nicocles of Salamis, and in the process described his deeds and his relationship with external powers, most importantly the Persians and Athenians; most famously, Evagoras overthrew the Phoenician dynasty that had usurped the Salaminian throne during the 5th century and restored his family’s rule over the city (Isocrates 9.30–2; also Diodorus 14.98). After restoring the throne, Evagoras was known for his philhellenic policies and is even honoured in a surviving but fragmentary Athenian inscription for his services to the state, and alongside Conon received an honorific statue next to the Tyrannicides, the first time any living individuals had been given statues at Athens.⁶⁶ He also maintained peaceful relations with the Persians

⁶³ O. Masson (1971b) 449.

⁶⁴ O. Masson (1961/83) nos. 405, 406.

⁶⁵ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Salamis 13, O. Masson (1961/83) no. 318d. See also Roesch (1973), Panayotou-Triantaphyllopoulou and Michaelidou-Nicolaou (1998).

⁶⁶ The inscription is *Inscriptiones Graecae* I 64, II 113; see Lewis and Stroud (1979). See also Raptou (1999) 250–62 on relations with Athens in Evagoras’ reign. I am also grateful to Daniel Unruh for the information on the statues.

for some time, although these eventually fell apart and after some hostilities he returned to paying yearly tribute to the Persian Great King.⁶⁷

The background of Evagoras' ambitious international policies is key to understanding the choice to place the Greek alphabet, which was the official script of Athens and the rest of the Greek-speaking world, on some of his coins.⁶⁸ Doing so represented a departure from the practice of his ancestors, who as kings of Salamis had used only the Cypriot Syllabary on their coins.⁶⁹ Evagoras also issued some coins with only the Cypriot Syllabary, but he is particularly noted for introducing digraphic coinage where the local syllabary was placed alongside the international alphabet.⁷⁰ Figure 5.14 shows one of his digraphic issues, where the obverse features only a syllabic inscription reading *e-u-wa-ko-ro* next to Herakles' head, while the reverse has a rather jumbled arrangement of syllabic signs reading *pa-si-le-wo-se* in an anticlockwise direction from the right (*pa* is in front of the goat's head), followed by three alphabetic signs *EYA* (*epsilon* and *upsilon* are below the dotted line, while the *alpha* is below the syllabic sign *pa* next to the goat's forelegs). The information encoded in the Greek alphabet on this coin is not enough to convey his identity to an international audience, consisting of only the first three letters of his name, while his name appears in full in the syllabic script, as well as the whole word for 'king'. While the inclusion of some alphabetic signs might have been intended for broader appeal, it is



Figure 5.14 Coin of Evagoras I of Salamis.

⁶⁷ See Costa (1974), Zournatzi (1991) and Alexiou (2010) as starting points for research on Evagoras' policies and external relations.

⁶⁸ Cf. McGregor (1999) 325.

⁶⁹ On the coins attributed to Salamis from the 6th century BC onwards, see Hill (1904) 46–65. The earliest king recorded in coinage, Evelthon, also pursued international connections (Herodotus 4.162.2–5) but used only the local syllabic script on his coins.

⁷⁰ See Masson and Amandry (1988) 35–40, Destrooper-Georgiades (2007) 39–40.

more likely that it made a greater impression on his fellow Cypriots by emphasising his international connections and thereby reinforcing his position. Evagoras' descendants continued the tradition of using the alphabet on some of their coins, again often using abbreviated forms. The early visibility of the alphabet under Evagoras' reign at Salamis may have been a contributing factor in the syllabic/alphabetic biliteracy shown by one of the mercenaries who wrote his name on the wall of the temple of Achoris at Karnak, naming himself as Philokreōn son of Timas of Salamis (see above, [section 5.2.2](#) s.v. Egypt).

Salamis was not the only city kingdom of Cyprus that began to issue coins that made use of the Greek alphabet, and the practice became more widespread over the course of the 4th century BC. At Marion, where bilingual and digraphic coins in syllabic Greek and Phoenician had been issued during the 5th century (see [Chapter 4, section 4.2.2](#) s.v. Marion), the Greek alphabet began to make an appearance on coinage during the later 4th century under the reign of Stasioikos II. While some of his coins bore only the Cypriot Syllabary, others used the syllabic script to represent the king's name and the alphabet to represent the name of the city, often in abbreviated form as *MAPI*.⁷¹ Even in the Cypriot Syllabary, Stasioikos II spelt his name *sa-ta-si-o-i-ko*, rather than *sa-ta-si-wo-i-ko* like his ancestor Stasi(w)oikos I in the later 5th century: as an element characteristic of Cypriot Greek in spelling even after the phoneme weakened and was eventually lost,⁷² the omission of written /w/ here could be interpreted as part of a process of 'pan-hellenisation' that made the name sound more normal in the context of the wider Greek-speaking world.⁷³ If so, this could have been a deliberate strategy on the part of Stasioikos, but on the other hand is unlikely to have made much of an impression outside of Cyprus because of the inaccessibility of the script in which it is written. The choice to write the city name in the Greek alphabet makes it appear that communicating the provenance of the coin to an international audience was a more important factor.

The kings of Paphos also began to incorporate the Greek alphabet into their coinage during the later part of the 4th century BC. King Timarchos began the trend with digraphic issues, again writing his name in the Cypriot

⁷¹ O. Masson (1961/83) no. 171, Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Marion 114. Markou (2006) 45 suggests that some of the coins attributed to Stasioikos II, usually interpreted as bearing an abbreviated reference to his name (e.g. *sa-ta*), could in fact have been issued by a different king with a similar name. This would help to fill in a gap in the known list of Marian kings in the mid-4th century.

⁷² See Morpurgo Davies (1988) 101–8.

⁷³ Palaima (1991) 466.

Syllabary but adding an alphabetic abbreviation ΠΑΦΙ or ΠΑ for Paphos. This abbreviation is very similar in type to one used on coins of Marion, ΜΑΡΙ, and looks somewhat symptomatic of Cypriot digraphia: these are open syllables, in groups that could be represented in syllabic signs as *pa-pi*, *pa* and *ma-ri*. The choice by Evagoras I of Salamis to use the first three letters of his name in the Greek alphabet, ΕΥΑ (Figure 5.14), can be seen to work along the same principles because it again consists of open syllables that could be written in the Cypriot Syllabary as *e-u-wa*. There are occasional abbreviations that do not follow these rules (e.g. ΜΑΡ for Marion, which could not be written in the syllabary without using a dummy vowel because it is not possible to write /r/ alone), but they are relatively limited.⁷⁴ The possible influence of syllabic writing on many of these abbreviations is striking, and could suggest that the Cypriot Syllabary was the more familiar script to the authors of the coin legends, giving them a natural tendency to break words up into syllables when they wrote in a less familiar script. These issues were commissioned at a time when syllabic writing was still very much alive, and although the alphabet had begun to manifest its presence on Cyprus at this time, it did not seem to threaten literacy in the syllabic script until a later period.

The last king of Paphos before the political unification of the island under the Ptolemies was Nicocles, who again notably embraced the use of the Greek alphabet for official inscriptions. He issued coins written solely in the alphabet, with longer text than was usually accommodated on coins (Figure 5.15): one issue has an abbreviation ΠΒΑ (Π for Paphos and ΒΑ for



Figure 5.15 Coin of Nicocles of Paphos.

⁷⁴ The coinage of Archaic Greece shows some use of abbreviations, which are sometimes a single open syllable or string of two open syllables, but can also often consist of single letters or closed syllables, hence a somewhat different pattern to that in use in Cyprus. I am grateful to Andrew Meadows for this information. On inscriptions on Cypriot coinage, see also Kushnet (2014) 114–16.

basileus, ‘king’) on one side and the text *ΝΙΚΟΚΛΕΟΥΣ ΠΑΦΙΟΝ* on the other.⁷⁵ He did not, however, abandon the local Cypriot script altogether. Nicocles is named in a number of official Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions, including two dedications found at Paphos itself, as well as possibly a marble plaque whose attribution to Nicocles is less certain.⁷⁶ He set up two further syllabic dedications at the inland site of Ayia Moni, close to the Troodos mountains,⁷⁷ which must have been at the limits of the kingdom’s territorial control and fits well with a trend across the island that saw rural sanctuaries playing a role in marking the borders of the domains of individual kingdoms.⁷⁸ At Nea Paphos, a site founded probably in Nicocles’ reign as a new centre for the polity of Paphos, he issued another dedicatory inscription, this one written in both the Cypriot Syllabary and the Greek alphabet, the alphabetic half of which appears to be metrical but is poorly preserved.⁷⁹ The syllabic half occupies the upper portion of the text, with the alphabet beneath, and visually subsidiary, to the syllabic script. Nicocles also issued an alphabetic inscription that was found in the temple of Aphrodite at Palaepaphos (i.e. the old town that had been Paphos’ political centre until the creation of Nea Paphos) and commemorates the restoration of some city walls.⁸⁰ He makes another epigraphic appearance in an alphabetic inscription from a sanctuary at Ledra near modern Nicosia, where a man named Archaïos made a dedication to him.⁸¹

Soloi was another city kingdom that began to introduce the Greek alphabet into its coin legends in the 4th century BC. The coin inscriptions

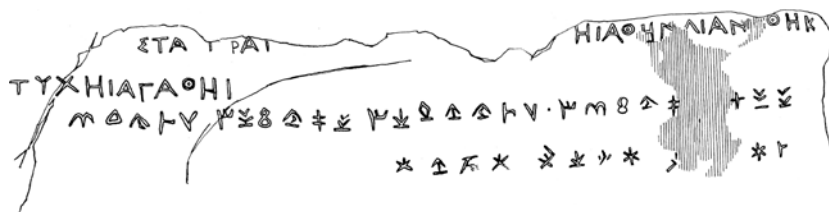


Figure 5.16 Digraphic royal inscription from Soloi.

⁷⁵ See Hill (1904) lxxix–lxxx.

⁷⁶ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Paphos 1, 2, 3; O. Masson (1961/83) nos. 6, 7, 8. On the third inscription, see O. Masson (1980).

⁷⁷ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Ayia Moni 1, 2; O. Masson (1961/83) nos. 90, 91.

⁷⁸ Satraki (2010) 201, Fourrier (2002).

⁷⁹ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Nea Paphos 1, O. Masson (1961/83) no. 1, Mitford (1960) 201, Voskou (1997) E59.

⁸⁰ Gardner, Hogarth and James (1888) 239, Mitford (1960) 203.

⁸¹ SEG 20 (1964) no. 114, Voskou (1997) E13.

again consist of short abbreviations in both the syllabary and the alphabet.⁸² A more visible manifestation of the alphabet at the city is a royal inscription dedicated by King Stasikrates to the goddess Athena, dated to 350–325 BC (Figure 5.16).⁸³ The object was found not in the area of Soloi itself but at Larnaca, but is likely to have been moved there in or by the Roman period, at which time a second, unrelated inscription had been added on another face of the stone. The content of the inscription, however, strongly suggests that it originated from Soloi, perhaps from a sanctuary. The alphabetic part of the inscription is quite damaged, but we can observe that in this case it was placed above the syllabic part, most of which is intact. What survives of the alphabetic half suggests that it gave a version of the text that was very close to the syllabic half, which names the dedicant as *o-(s)o-lo-ne pa-si-le-u-se sa-ta-si-ka-ṛa-te-se o-pa-si-le-o-se sa-ta-ṣi-ja-u*: Stasikrates, king of Soloi, son of King Stasias.⁸⁴ The name of the goddess, Athena, is preserved in the alphabetic part but is badly damaged in the syllabic part. Perhaps most striking is the presence of a phenomenon that we saw in a number of bilingual inscriptions (Chapter 4, section 4.3), namely the use of equivalent but not equal dedicatory formulae: the alphabetic half ends with *tuk^hēi agat^hēi* (‘to good fortune’), while the syllabic half ends with the typical Cypriot *i-tu-ka-i* (‘to fortune’), obviously related but with slightly different formulations in each dialect and both conforming to and accommodating the standard Cypriot practice.

Among the inscriptions issued by the authorities of the city kingdoms, we must also add some bilingual digraphic ones, which were examined in more detail in Chapter 4 (section 4.3 s.v. Amathus). At Amathus, some manifestations of the Greek alphabet had already appeared in the 5th–4th centuries BC, some on pottery sherds and others on grave stelai.⁸⁵ One epitaph on a stele records foreign origins for the deceased individual from Halicarnassus and so is unlikely to be a reflex of local alphabetic literacy, and the same can be said for a 4th-century bowl inscribed by an individual from Naxos. The pottery sherds have been argued to represent some hellenisation of local trade and administration, possibly attesting to contact

⁸² See Babelon (1907) 609–10.

⁸³ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Soloi 2, O. Masson (1961/83) no. 212. See also Egetmeyer (2002a).

⁸⁴ The syllabic part appears to begin with *o-o-* rather than *o-so-* as reconstructed here. The signs *o* and *so* are very similar and differ only in the number of horizontal lines at the base of the sign: one for *o* and two for *so*. It is likely that the second sign (the second from the right in the upper line of syllabic text) is slightly damaged, though a mistake whereby *o* was written but *so* was intended is also possible. The restoration of the name of the city Soloi is convincing given the appearance of King Stasikrates’ name.

⁸⁵ See Steele (2013) 164–6.

between Amathus and the wider Greek-speaking world in this period.⁸⁶ By the later part of the 4th century, the Greek alphabet was also incorporated into inscriptions that were issued by the city's authorities, in one case by the city of Amathus itself and in two others by its king, Androcles (discussed in section 4.3). These were not only digraphic but bilingual texts, incorporating both the local Eteocypriot language and the pan-Mediterranean Koine dialect of Greek. Issued in the last phases of Amathus' independence as a city kingdom, like some of the other royal inscriptions and coins from kingdoms across Cyprus, the visibility of the Greek alphabet in the public landscape of Amathus was almost certainly a symptom of its time, as the island was drawn into the new political map of the eastern Mediterranean following the conquests of Alexander the Great. The complete bilingual from Amathus in particular is a striking testament to the possibility of mixing a contemporary wider Greek tradition (of individuals being honoured in alphabetic inscriptions by a civic body) with a characteristic local epigraphic practice (using a distinctive Cypriot language and writing system): such a choice puts both Mediterranean customs and local identity very clearly on the agenda.

The inscriptions we have considered so far in this section have been ones created and disseminated mostly by royal authorities and represent deliberate policies that must be read within their political context. There are, however, a number of further inscriptions dating to the 4th century that point towards the alphabet becoming a familiar writing system to individuals in the lower strata of society, who began to use it for public and private means. Under this heading must fall the digraphic inscription from Sarepta and the alphabetic and digraphic graffiti on the walls of the temple of Achoris at Karnak, discussed in the [previous section](#), which were created by Cypriots abroad. In Cyprus too, a few examples of digraphic syllabic/alphabetic inscriptions have been found. At Kourion, a statuette base found at a temple site records a dedication by Potesios son of Ello(w)oikos to Demeter and Kore ([Figure 5.17](#)).⁸⁷ It places the Greek alphabet first, with two lines of alphabetic text and one line of syllabic text underneath. The two halves match closely in content, but we may note the addition of the Cypriot votive formule *i-tu-ka-i* at the end of the syllabic half only, as well as the retention of written /w/ in the dedicant's name in the syllabic part: he is Ἐλλόοικος in the alphabetic text (with no elision where the /w/ is missing, suggesting that the /w/ may have been retained in pronunciation but could

⁸⁶ Petit (1991), Aupert (2003).

⁸⁷ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Kourion 9, O. Masson (1961/83) no. 182.



Figure 5.17 Digraphic statuette base from Kourion.

not be written because the version of the Greek alphabet used had no sign for /w/) but *e-lo-wo-i-ko-se* in the syllabic. The inscription was obviously created for public viewing, marking the piety of the dedicant for the community to see, and can be counted as a public text. The use of writing is deliberately aesthetically pleasing as part of the statuette's ensemble, with even spacing and careful execution of each sign.

Another digraphic inscription that crosses the line between private dedication and public display is a grave stele found at Stavros Mytous, in the south-west of Cyprus not far from Paphos.⁸⁸ In this case, however, the Greek alphabetic text takes clear precedence over the Cypriot Syllabic: a four-line epigram written in the Greek Koine and alphabet occupies the upper part of the stone and honours the deceased man, Onasas son of Onasas, while below it a single line of syllabic text gives only his name and patronymic with no further details. The inscription has been dated to the 4th century and is unlikely to be earlier because of its Koine Greek text, but without any external reference the dating remains very tentative; indeed a later date cannot be ruled out. The characteristically Cypriot name Onasas makes it likely that this inscription originated from a native Cypriot, making it stand out from a number of other inscriptions that were clearly created by foreigners, including the digraphic and bilingual stele of a Lycian man found at Kition (see [Chapter 4, section 4.3](#) s.v. Kition) as well as the Amathus epitaphs mentioned above. Some other epitaphs belonging probably to the 5th century are more difficult to judge in this regard, for example some grave stelai from Golgoi bearing alphabetic-only inscriptions.⁸⁹ Golgoi could perhaps be a special case, considering the appearance of the Greek alphabet alongside the Cypriot Syllabary in the 6th-century inscription of Karyx discussed in the [previous section](#); an inscribed pyxis bearing an alphabetic dedication to Apollo from the same site further supports this impression.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Stavros Mytous 1, O. Masson (1961/83) no. 83.

⁸⁹ SEG 15 (1958) no. 841, 23 (1968) no. 607.

⁹⁰ SEG 23 (1968) no. 606.

Inscriptions of a lower register, for example graffiti, are more difficult to find, although it is impossible to know whether this is due to restricted alphabetic literacy or to the lower visibility of inscriptions of this type in the material record. One alphabetic inscription on a 5th- or 4th-century Attic cup of unknown provenance within Cyprus is unlikely to have originated from the island and is of limited value as evidence for local literacy.⁹¹ The same can probably be said of some graffiti of similar date on Attic vases found at Kition.⁹² There are also alphabetic inscriptions on lead sling bullets dating to the 4th century, with short texts giving the name of an intended recipient.⁹³ A possible digraphic inscription from Tala near Paphos and another on a statue of unknown provenance may again point towards growing alphabetic literacy in the later 4th century.⁹⁴ We can also perhaps include a graffito on a stone pedestal found at Golgoi, written in the Greek alphabet but with some odd-looking signs that could indicate influence from the Cypriot Syllabary.⁹⁵ The final sign in the name Timodōros at the beginning of this last inscription has been suggested to be a syllabic *se* as a mistake instead of alphabetic *sigma*, but it is difficult to read and could perhaps be an alphabetic *upsilon* clumsily written (making it the genitive Timodōrou, not the nominative Timodōros). Some other unclear signs in the inscription could also perhaps be syllabic ones, but are too damaged to be certain.

Towards the end of the 4th century BC, Cyprus was profoundly affected by political change as the island came under the control of the Ptolemaic regime. This was to have a major impact on writing in Cyprus, with a drastic shift in the epigraphic record that saw the end of the Cypriot Syllabic and Phoenician scripts.

5.3.3 The End of the 4th Century BC and Beyond

The changes in the Cypriot epigraphic record towards the end of the 4th century BC and into the 3rd (and perhaps even later) can only be understood in light of the historical events that shaped them. The leaders of the Cypriot city kingdoms had already played a role in the campaigns of Alexander the Great, and benefited from his defeat of the Persians, to whom they had been paying tribute. However, following Alexander's death in 323 BC, his generals

⁹¹ Myres and Ohnefalsch-Richter (1899) no. 1556.

⁹² SEG 32 (1982) nos. 1371–4.

⁹³ E.g. Michaelidou-Nicolaou (1971) no. 25, (1984) no. 16.

⁹⁴ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Tala 2 and No provenance 73.

⁹⁵ See O. Masson (1971a).

(often labelled the *Diadochoi*, or ‘successors’) fought over Cyprus. Although the island eventually fell under the rule of the Ptolemaic dynasty, it did not do so without being scarred by the political upheaval caused by the sudden need for the rulers of the Cypriot city kingdoms to choose between Alexander’s old generals once he was dead.⁹⁶ The historians Arrian (*Anabasis* 1.16) and Diodorus Siculus (19–20) relate some of the events in Cyprus during and after Alexander’s reign, although Cyprus is not itself the main focus of their broader narratives. Among the punishments doled out by Ptolemy I, when he prevailed over the other Diadochoi and took control of Cyprus, was the execution of Pumayyaton, the last king of Kition, who had chosen to side with Antigonus over Ptolemy after Alexander’s death. An even more devastating fate befell the kingdom of Marion, which was completely destroyed by Ptolemy, an event that must be reflected in the lack of clear archaeological remains of the city’s centre.⁹⁷ Nicocles of Paphos, although he had at first taken Ptolemy’s side, switched his allegiance to the Antigonid dynasty and brought about his own downfall, eventually committing suicide along with his household (Diodorus Siculus 20.21).⁹⁸ The kingdoms that sided with and kept faith with Ptolemy were in a better position to prosper during this period, and one of their rulers, Nikokreon the last king of Salamis, was appointed as Strategos to rule over the whole island until his death in 311/310 BC when Ptolemy himself took over.⁹⁹ From this point, the city kingdoms ceased to exist altogether, and the island became politically unified.¹⁰⁰

Despite the political changes that in some areas were characterised by violent episodes, the continued existence of most of Cyprus’ cities points towards some stability in the local landscape,¹⁰¹ as do certain continuities in religious practice across the divide.¹⁰² However, in the area of writing, there appear to have been drastic and sudden changes that must be associated with the political ones. Inscriptions in the Cypriot Syllabic script become incredibly rare following the 4th century and disappear altogether at the end of the 3rd or beginning of the 2nd, as do Phoenician inscriptions. The Greek alphabet, at the same time, became the standard script used for

⁹⁶ On this period and its impact on Cypriot political geography, see S. Lejeune (2013).

⁹⁷ See Childs (1997).

⁹⁸ See also Gesche (1974) on Diodorus’ account.

⁹⁹ The events are told in Diodorus Siculus (19.79.4–5) and Ptolemy’s rule after Nikokreon’s death is also mentioned in the Parian Marble, an inscription detailing Greek chronology found in Paros (*Inscriptiones Graecae* 12, 5, 444).

¹⁰⁰ See Collombier (1993), Mehl (2004).

¹⁰¹ See Mitford (1953).

¹⁰² Papantoniou (2012), (2013a), (2013b).

official inscriptions, and during the 3rd century alphabetic texts became the norm, as far as we can tell from surviving texts. The characteristic mark of Cypriot identity in the form of archaic-looking, syllabic writing seems to have disappeared within 100–150 years after the Ptolemaic conquest, as did the linguistic diversity that had embodied the age of the city kingdoms. It was in the transition to Ptolemaic rule that, allegedly, ‘Cyprus seemed to lose her soul’.¹⁰³

A closer inspection of the epigraphic record in this important period reveals that the demise of traditional Cypriot scripts and languages by and in the 3rd century BC was probably not as sudden or devastating as it appears according to the traditional view outlined in the last paragraph. Numbers of Greek alphabetic inscriptions do pick up at the end of the 4th and especially in the course of the 3rd century, and it is particularly two types of alphabetic inscription that seem to become suddenly very popular: administrative ones originating from or relating to the new Ptolemaic regime, and, perhaps more strikingly, religious dedications. The alphabet was the natural tool of the new political regime, and so alphabetic administrative inscriptions are more closely related to politics and indeed practical administrative concerns than literacy: official inscriptions simply change in character (and so in script) with a new, external regime in charge. The sudden prevalence of alphabetic religious dedications, however, is a much better indicator that Cypriot individuals were now making a deliberate choice to use the international alphabet rather than their traditional local syllabary in their religious practice. As we saw above, however, religious dedications belong very much to the sphere of public epigraphy, because they involve making a visible statement about one’s piety (and, very often, one’s wealth) in the context of public sanctuaries. When a Cypriot of the early 3rd century commissioned a religious inscription, a decision to use the Greek alphabet rather than the Cypriot Syllabary is likely to have been motivated not by familiarity with the alphabetic system (or at least not by familiarity alone) but also by an expectation that monumental inscriptions use the alphabet now, just like official ones issued by Ptolemy or his administrators. One of the last surviving examples of the Phoenician script from Cyprus, a bilingual inscription erected at Larnax tes Lapethou to commemorate a victory of Ptolemy (end of the 4th or beginning of the 3rd century BC), shows this clearly (see [Chapter 4, section 4.3](#) s.v. Lapethos): it is written as a bilingual text with Koine Greek in the alphabet appearing above Phoenician written

¹⁰³ Mitford (1953) 90.

in its own consonantal alphabet, but the awkwardness of the Greek text makes it very likely that it was written or dictated by an individual much more comfortable with Phoenician than Greek, who chose to put the Greek alphabet in a prominent position for political and social reasons rather than purely linguistic or epigraphic ones.

Taken at face value, 'script death' looks like a violent event, where a writing system is deliberately 'killed' and then disappears from the epigraphic record suddenly. The reality is probably quite different, and can be thought of along similar principles to 'language death'.¹⁰⁴ Languages rarely die because of a fixed policy, and tend to disappear only after a process during which speakers of the old language chose to learn and eventually switch to a different language. A famous example often cited is the use of local languages at Cumae in ancient Italy during the mid-1st millennium BC, which declined and eventually were replaced by Latin. The Roman historian Livy (40.43) tells us that in 180 BC the citizens of Cumae formally requested to be permitted to use the Latin language in public assemblies and auctions, showing a conscious choice to switch language for particular situations. It is at about the same time that written Oscan, a local Italic language, begins to disappear from the extant record.¹⁰⁵ In a similar way to the Cumaeans making a positive choice to adopt Latin, all the evidence we have seen so far suggests that Cypriots made a positive choice to adopt the Greek alphabet, a process that began earlier than the advent of Ptolemaic rule (see the previous sections) but took some time to take hold completely. The motivations for that choice may have varied from case to case. Using the alphabet in a private inscription or a graffito could make the author appear erudite or open to international trends, while using it in a coin or official inscription could make a political statement about belonging to or having access to the wider Greek-speaking world. It is important to note that script shifts, like language shifts, can also operate in isolated functional ranges. For example, the change from syllabary to alphabet in mainly public inscriptions on Cyprus could be compared with the change to Latin in official and commercial situations at Cumae. This does not mean that the syllabary was replaced in all areas of life immediately.¹⁰⁶

With the exception of a concentrated group of later finds from a single site (see further below), the last surviving inscriptions written in the Cypriot

¹⁰⁴ On the concept of the 'death' or disappearance of writing systems, see the collected papers in Baines, Bennet and Houston (2008).

¹⁰⁵ On Oscan generally, see McDonald (2015). Discussions of the decline of Etruscan in Italy, concomitant with a rise in Latin, are also illuminating, e.g. Kaimio (1974).

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Adams (2003) 127.

Syllabary date to c.300 BC. They include a clay dish from Chytroi with a short dedication to (Apollo) Hylates (*to-u-la-to*) and a hydria found near Marion with a short text denoting possession (*ti-mo-ke-le-?*, ‘of Timokle(s)’).¹⁰⁷ Some marks on pottery sherds found at Tamassos may be of similar date but consist of only single signs.¹⁰⁸ At Golgoi, a number of inscriptions date to the end of the 4th or the earlier 3rd century, representing the best evidence for continued usage of the Cypriot Syllabary in this late period. Two sculpted limestone ears bear what look like inscriptions denoting possession, one in Greek (*to-po-to-e-mi*, ‘I belong to Po(n)tos’) and the other probably in a non-Greek language (*pø-i-to-ta-ko*).¹⁰⁹ There are also some votive inscriptions from Golgoi bearing dedications, the latest of which is probably one with a dedication to Apollo made by an individual called Diaithemis (see Figure 5.19 below).¹¹⁰ The decentralised position of Golgoi, away from any political centre (the nearest being Salamis to the site’s east), as well as the religious context of most of the inscriptions, could be contributory factors in the relatively late continued visibility of the script here. An intaglio of unknown provenance could date as late as the mid-3rd century but its context is uncertain and its inscription short and quite obscure (an *a* with three signs below: *sa-pa-ri*).¹¹¹ There are also some late syllabic inscriptions found outside Cyprus, including the inscribed coins found at Meydancikkale in Cilicia, as well as marks on pottery from Leukos Limen and Tel Soukas (see [section 5.2.2](#) above). The most striking feature of all these late inscriptions is that they are almost all short and private texts of various kinds, with the only exceptions being the religious dedications from Golgoi. This could be indicative of a narrower functional range for the syllabic script, confined in this period to particular inscription types that lie mostly outside of the sphere of public display. In turn this could correlate with lower visibility of the script in the extant material record.

After a gap in attested epigraphy, a final group of syllabic inscriptions appears. Dated probably to the first quarter of the 2nd century BC (c.183–177),¹¹² a large number of religious dedications were made at the sanctuary of the Nymph at Kafizin, near modern-day Nicosia. Not all of them are

¹⁰⁷ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Chytroi 20, Marion 41; O. Masson (1961/83) no. 250a, p. 130.

¹⁰⁸ See Buchholz (1983) 71.

¹⁰⁹ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Golgoi 29, 30; O. Masson (1961/83) nos. 288, 289.

¹¹⁰ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Golgoi 7, O. Masson (1961/83) no. 266. The others are Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 Golgoi 8, 10, 11; O. Masson (1961/83) nos. 267, 269, 270.

¹¹¹ Egetmeyer (2010a) vol. 2 No provenance 35, O. Masson (1961/83) no. 367e.

¹¹² This date is argued convincingly by S. Lejeune (2014) esp. 258–70, and replaces the traditional dating to the last quarter of the 3rd century BC (c.225–218) proposed by Mitford (1980) pp. 251–2.

written in the Cypriot Syllabary: some are Cypriot Syllabic only, a larger number are Greek alphabetic only and some are digraphic, using both scripts. The majority of the texts were discovered in the 1930s after a reformed grave-robbler gave information about the hill where the sanctuary was located to the Cyprus Museum,¹¹³ and they were then investigated and edited by Terence Mitford, and finally published in 1980, shortly after his death. If it were not for this fortuitous discovery, the Cypriot Syllabary would indeed seem to have disappeared altogether about 300 BC or not long after.

Of the 310 inscriptions surviving from Kafizin, only 32 or 33 are written in the syllabary only, and a further 33 or 35 are digraphic.¹¹⁴ The rest, between 242 and 245 pieces in total, are inscribed in the Greek alphabet. The inscriptions are written on pieces of pottery of a range of types, from decorated fine wares to everyday utilitarian pots; the syllabic inscriptions are almost completely confined to the utilitarian ones, with only two exceptions, while decorated pots are usually inscribed with the alphabet. The inscriptions sometimes also incorporate decorative elements such as figures or floral motifs (e.g. [Figure 5.18](#)). Most of the vessels are badly

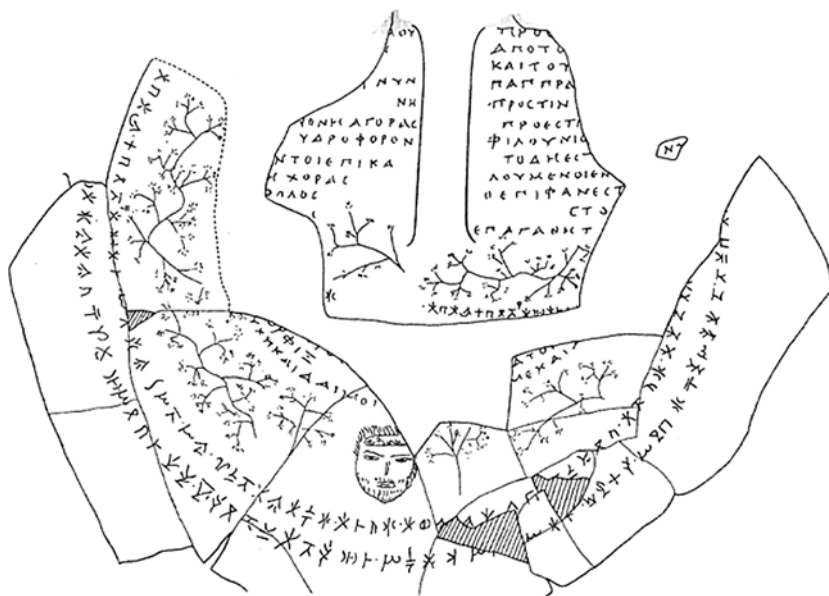


Figure 5.18 Drawing of one of the Kafizin digraphic inscriptions.

¹¹³ See Mitford (1980) p. 3.

¹¹⁴ In Mitford (1980), no. 309 inscriptions are listed. A further one (alphabetic) is published in Hermay (2006). The uncertainty over the exact number that are syllabic-only, alphabetic-only or digraphic depends on the interpretation of some damaged pieces as belonging to one group or another: see S. Lejeune (2014) 270 n.74. For Consani (2015) 135, there are 244 alphabetic-only inscriptions, 34 syllabic-only and 32 digraphic.

broken, and the inscriptions have often had to be pieced together over numerous broken fragments. Many lacunae remain in the texts, and reconstructions of their sense are often quite hypothetical. Nevertheless, from the ones that can be understood well, some trends emerge. Although there are many formulaic elements to the texts, in particular invocations of the Nymph, Mitford has emphasised that the Cypriot Syllabary is ‘intelligently used’ in the 66 or so texts in which it appears.¹¹⁵

The syllabary is used exclusively to write the local Cypriot dialect, just as the alphabet is used exclusively for the international Koine, and it has often been claimed that the syllabic Kafizin inscriptions show a moribund local dialect in a sort of final fling of Cypriot dialectal literacy.¹¹⁶ For example, where Cypriot dialectal inscriptions traditionally retained a /w/ phoneme and preserved it in writing, at Kafizin there is evidence for hypercorrecting /w/, i.e. writing a <w> where it does not belong etymologically. For example, in one of the inscriptions,¹¹⁷ the word *a-wi-la* appears in place of expected *a-i-la*, suggesting that whoever wrote it did not know where /w/ should and should not appear. Such uncertainty could suggest that the sound was no longer in use (or not widely in use), but was sometimes written because of an attachment to the traditional spelling or pronunciation of words that once contained it, and sometimes incorrectly ‘restored’ in words that did not. However, this does not have to mean that the dialect was moribund, and could simply indicate that its phonology had changed much more progressively than its writing. In fact, there are Cypriot examples of hypercorrecting /w/ as early as the 7th or 6th century BC, pointing towards an unstable /w/ phoneme that was liable to loss and that was disappearing over time.¹¹⁸ By the time of the Kafizin inscriptions, it is unsurprising that the loss of /w/ was at a much more advanced stage. On the other hand, it is striking that there remained a collective cultural memory that dialectal spellings were supposed to retain /w/ even if it was not pronounced. It is furthermore important to note that influence from Koine Greek seems to have affected the use of the Cypriot dialect on levels other than phonology, including morphology and syntax; at the same time, however, there also seems to be some Cypriot dialectal influence on local use of the Koine.¹¹⁹ These features appear to be a reflex of contact between spoken Cypriot and Koine dialect.

¹¹⁵ Mitford (1980) p. 264.

¹¹⁶ See especially Brixhe (1988).

¹¹⁷ Mitford (1980) no. 159.

¹¹⁸ See Morpurgo Davies (1988) 101–8.

¹¹⁹ See Consani (1986) and Brixhe (1988).

The Kafizin inscriptions seem to have originated from a tradition of creating vessels for this particular religious context, added by the potter or craftsman responsible for the object and in some cases signed by them. Sometimes they chose to use the syllabary alone or a combination of the syllabary and alphabet, but more often they used the alphabet only. The restriction of the syllabary to utilitarian and undecorated wares may suggest a functional difference, with the alphabet seen as the appropriate script to use on decorated vessels that would presumably have been aimed at a more expensive market. This could correlate with the alphabet by this time being well established as the script of monumental and public texts. In this context, however, it is important to note that even though the syllabary looks like a minority script at Kafizin, a consideration of the alphabetic texts shows that they are often heavily influenced by syllabic spellings, with confusion over the length of vowels (a distinction not marked in the syllabic script) and sometimes failure to represent double consonants: e.g. Ὠνησαγόρας for Ὀνασσαγόρας and Ταμάσιος for Ταμάσσιος, etc.¹²⁰ This looks like influence going in the opposite direction, with a syllabic script that perhaps remains the primary writing system for some of the authors having a significant effect on their spelling of alphabetic texts. Such influence can only have been possible if literacy in the syllabic script had been maintained throughout the 3rd century and continued at Kafizin in the early decades of the 2nd. Even so, the multiple styles of written alphabet on the vessels, sometimes ‘classical’ (i.e. similar to the alphabet as used in stone inscriptions) and sometimes cursive (i.e. less neat and closer to handwriting), give the impression of varying competence in alphabetic literacy.

What are we to make of the Kafizin inscriptions? One thing they do tell us is that both the Cypriot Syllabary and the Greek alphabet, and with them both the Cypriot dialect and the Koine dialect of Greek, were seen as appropriate tools with which to record dedications to the Nymph in the context of this early 2nd-century BC cult. The context of use in a religious sphere, as distinct from other spheres in which writing could be used (political, funerary, etc.), may be significant. Between individual authors of the texts, competence in each language/script, and the degree of bidialectalism and biliteracy, undoubtedly varied. There also seems to have been some significant difference in the intended audiences of the syllabic

¹²⁰ See Mitford (1980) p. 265 as well as Brixhe (1988) on some of these features.

and the alphabetic texts, if the distribution across different types of ware is anything to go by. Nevertheless, the only way of understanding the presence of the syllabary at Kafizin, as well as its obvious influence on alphabetic spelling at the site, is to assume that the script had remained in use throughout the 3rd century and into the 2nd, with no break in syllabic literacy such as has sometimes been suggested.¹²¹ If the syllabary otherwise appears to be almost non-existent during the 3rd century, its newly restricted functional range can be called on to explain this, with syllabic texts appearing on less durable media and only usually on stone if it was in a votive context (such as the dedicatory inscription of Diaithemis from Golgoi in Figure 5.19). In this period the alphabet was simply often seen as the more appropriate script for more permanent inscriptions on stone, especially for official or political texts. It seems very likely that a wider range of syllabic inscriptions from this period on less permanent materials have been lost to us.

In this context, the claim that the late use of the Cypriot Syllabary seen at Kafizin represents some sort of ‘guerrilla warfare’ seems rather far-fetched. These are manifestly not furtive uses of the script in defiance of a



Figure 5.19 Syllabic dedication to Apollo, by an individual named Diaithemis, found at Golgoi.

¹²¹ E.g. Brixhe (1988) 168. *Contra*, see Steele (2013) 238–9.

Ptolemaic policy that all writing should now be in the alphabet. Rather, they are the last surviving attestation of a situation in which both the syllabary and the alphabet were seen as appropriate vehicles for this inscription type. The distribution of syllabic and alphabetic inscriptions at Kafizin, with only 32 or 33 out of 310 texts using the syllabary alone (and only between 65 and 68 using it at all), points towards the alphabet as the preferred writing system even though it is evident that not all of the authors were yet very proficient in its use. Cypriots were choosing the new international script over the traditional local one, and this positive choice led to what looks in hindsight like a negative effect: the ‘death’ of the Cypriot Syllabary.

Kafizin is not quite the end of the story, however. The very last surviving traces of the Cypriot Syllabary come from the Roman archives of Paphos in the mid-2nd to late 1st centuries BC. The items are difficult to date exactly and could be as little as 50 or as much as 150 years after the Kafizin texts. They are not themselves inscriptions: they are the impressions of seals (known as ‘sealings’) that bore syllabic signs, sometimes single signs (as in Figure 5.20) and sometimes short sign sequences that probably represent abbreviated names (e.g. *ti-mo* and *o-na*).¹²² The seals (probably seal rings) that made the impressions would have borne the original inscriptions, but these have not been recovered and we are left with only the impressions they made on small lumps of clay. These sealings were used on documents made of papyrus, traces of which survive on the



Figure 5.20 Seal impression from Nea Paphos, no. 6434, bearing a zebra facing right and the syllabic sign *a* above its back.

¹²² Michaelidou-Nicolaou (1993).

reverse of some of them although the documents themselves do not survive. The traditional view has been that the sealings do not reflect syllabic literacy at the time when the documents were sealed, and that the seals themselves were old items, perhaps heirlooms, that bore an old script that nobody could read any more.¹²³ But it is striking that there are impressions from not just one or two but at least 16 different seals.¹²⁴ This clearly does not indicate the isolated use of an old seal by one or two individuals but a more common practice on the part of a number of people playing a role in the administration of Nea Paphos in the Roman period. At a minimum, we can conclude that the seals bearing the syllabic signs were still in use when the impressions were made, and this in itself must suggest a lingering cultural memory of the syllabic script as symbolic of Cyprus, and perhaps even a continuing importance attached to the script's visibility even after it had ceased to be a widely used tool for Cypriot writing. Without direct evidence that the seals were old heirlooms, we could even postulate that syllabic literacy was not altogether dead by the 2nd–1st centuries BC: there may still have been individuals who remembered how to use it and who valued it highly enough to place it on a prized personal object such as a seal ring, and to use it to seal official documents. These sealings, along with the Kafizin texts, point towards a much slower death for Cypriot Syllabic writing than has usually been acknowledged, and show the sustained power of this unique writing system as a marker of Cypriot identity.

5.4 Epilogue: Reflections of Writing in Ancient Cyprus

This book finishes with the disappearance of writing systems other than the Greek alphabet from Cyprus. This looks like an obvious end-point to choose, because it marks a new horizon of Cypriot epigraphy, with a turn away from the distinctive scripts associated with the languages and dialects of the island, and a turn towards Mediterranean-wide customs with the use of the Greek alphabet and Koine dialect. As the [previous section](#) shows, however, there was no sudden death of one writing system nor a universal acceptance of another – and as we saw in [Chapters 1](#) (beginning of the Late

¹²³ E.g. Olivier (2013) 23.

¹²⁴ See Michaelidou-Nicolaou (1993) 344–6. Strikingly, the same sign sequence is sometimes found in the impressions of what were clearly different seals, distinguished by different depictions of gods and animals.

Bronze Age) and 2 (Early Iron Age), it is very likely that earlier periods of epigraphic genesis and change also involved similarly protracted periods of adjustment.

The story of writing in ancient Cyprus is inevitably one of change, because Cypriot society itself underwent numerous developments. If my reading of Evans-Pritchard (with nods to his work appearing at the beginning of each chapter) has added anything to this book, I hope it is a greater appreciation of the degree to which customs like writing are dependent on social context and on the current attitudes of the people using them. From this point of view, surviving ‘snapshots’ of writing in ancient Cyprus can tell us a great deal, even if we might complain that it is more difficult to understand the precise details of how one situation developed into another over time. So the problems of how Cypro-Minoan is related to Linear A, or how Cypro-Minoan developed into the later Cypriot Syllabary, are difficult to answer (see [Chapters 1 and 2](#)), but on the other hand, we can say considerably more about what writing was being used for, and in some cases about who was using it.

Written culture is ultimately a product of a society’s attitude towards writing, centring around the question of what people thought writing was useful for at any given time. In the Late Bronze Age, the initial impetus to write looks entangled with developments in administrative sophistication (no doubt based on, but not blindly copying, external models), while over time one trend that emerges is a link between writing and markers of social status and prestige. By the Early Iron Age, in the landscape of decentralised local power that led to the city kingdoms, the link with individual prestige was perhaps stronger than any link with administration, if surviving inscriptions are indicative of the overall picture. This would fit in well with a general impression of writing across the Mediterranean through the first two or three centuries of the 1st millennium BC, as alphabetic scripts spread and were adopted – in the case of the Greek alphabet for instance, it seems to have been used early on for personal purposes and often in the context of peer-group display. The distinctiveness of Cypriot writing also enables us to identify in these periods some instances of Cypriots writing abroad, and maintaining Cypriot writing customs, as we saw in the first half of [Chapter 5](#).

Moving further into the 1st millennium BC, we have an advantage, namely the survival of many inscriptions in Greek and Phoenician that we can read, providing an even greater insight into written culture because we can tell not only what people were writing on, but also what they were

writing about. An individualistic element of writing continues to prevail during this period, as represented for example by graffiti and short inscriptions on portable items like ceramic and metal vessels. However, there are changes too. New inscription types like gravestones begin to appear and to gain traction as a forum for commemorating particular kinds of community information in writing, and, around the same time, writing is appropriated as a tool of the elites of the city kingdoms, especially in the commissioning of royal inscriptions. Clearly for such inscriptions the element of display is important, and this may also relate to higher levels of literacy by the 4th century, reflected for example by the competence of Cypriots to write short inscriptions when travelling abroad (as we saw in the Egyptian graffiti discussed above).

Over time, writing in Cyprus responded to the needs of the community it served, and accordingly changed with those needs. The developments in epigraphic culture witnessed from the end of the 5th century BC onwards (discussed in the second half of [Chapter 5](#)) are thus entirely in line with earlier developments. A growing desire to learn or demonstrate knowledge of the Greek alphabet from this period onwards reflects developing relationships with, and entanglement in, the wider Mediterranean world. Eventually this culminates in what may have been sudden and decisive change in the Cypriot political regime, but nevertheless change that was accompanied by less abrupt developments in written culture. A trend already begun then gains new traction, and what changes is the context in which a particular script or language or dialect tends to be written down. So alphabetic writing looks dominant because of its appearance in monumental inscriptions (which also are the ones most visible in the surviving epigraphic record), but chance evidence from sites such as Kafizin and Nea Paphos provides valuable glimpses of the continuation of syllabic writing in very different contexts.

The earlier relationship between ancient Cyprus' distinctive scripts and the display of Cypriot identity and independence may be clear, but it has also somewhat been taken for granted. In some periods it was evidently important that Cypriot writing was visibly different from that in use elsewhere, or that it could be a visible representation of 'Cypriotness'. This is not a trend exclusive to Cyprus: think of the use of Hieroglyphic Luwian in Anatolia, or the emergence of Ugaritic cuneiform or Old Persian cuneiform, or the individuality of local Greek alphabets in the Archaic period. Later on, Cyprus witnessed a closer alignment with written culture around the Hellenistic Mediterranean, again in parallel with developments

elsewhere. In fact, what we have learnt from examining the Cypriot case is entirely relevant to trends in writing and literacy in other parts of the ancient world.¹²⁵ By looking at writing in Cyprus over a long period, and by considering different aspects of the study of written culture, I hope that the present work has added something to our understanding of the context of ancient Cypriot writing, as well as to the issue of how and why it changed over time.

¹²⁵ Some of the themes that have persisted throughout this book have formed the basis of a much wider investigation, under the direction of the present author, into the development of writing systems in the ancient Aegean, eastern Mediterranean and Near East: the ERC-funded project 'Contexts of and Relations between Early Writing Systems' (CREWS, grant no. 677758), <https://crewsproject.wordpress.com/> / @crewsproject.

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